

Hello there,

Welcome back to The Happy Client, I hope you all had a great summer. I survived not one, but two camping trips and must admit I enjoyed them far more than I thought I would!

With client listening and client relationships never far from my mind, my first camping trip of the summer compelled me to make some comparisons between camping and client listening which I [posted on LinkedIn](#).

Spending lots of time with my sons (aged six and three) over the summer, made me think of another comparison, this time between the relationship with young children and the relationship with our clients. I ended up drawing so many comparisons that I have split my thoughts across two editions of The Happy Client (September and October).

Framing expectations

When you have young children, you help them learn how to deal with certain situations because they're too young to work things out for themselves. Similarly, when you start working with a new client, the onus is on you to set out what they can expect in terms of the service and experience you'll be offering.

A service charter comes in useful. Not all businesses have one, but it's definitely something that helps with managing expectations (particularly when you're faced with clients who seem to demand a lot from you, see below) and also ensuring that your staff understand what's expected of them. You don't need to be overly prescriptive but setting out some kind of framework is a good idea so that everyone knows where they stand.

Setting boundaries

Although it might seem as if I'm putting all the responsibility for building strong relationships onto you as the supplier, client relationships are very much a two-way street. As with children, it's not fair for us to be imposing a set of rules without being prepared to modify our own behaviour.

Clients can be demanding, some more than others. It's important for you to have the time and space you need to do a good job for them. If they're being unreasonable and hounding you with messages, that's not okay. You need to tell them politely, but firmly, that you're dealing with things for them and will be responding within the timescales set out and agreed.

Over the summer, one of my accounting clients was being bombarded with messages from a small number of highly demanding clients (say, emailing at 9pm and then again at 8am the following day, complaining about the lack of response). This had driven my client to set an auto-response which was a little on the terse side, so I helped them rewrite the message, reassuring the client their messages had been safely received, the issues were being dealt with, and setting out the timescale they could expect for getting a full response. Simple, but effective.

Reward and recognition

Just as children thrive on being rewarded for good behaviour or doing well at school, those client relationships where loyalty and actions such as referrals are rewarded, will end up yielding the most benefit to both parties. You don't need to thank people with an extravagant gesture – a heartfelt 'thanks' is enough, perhaps via a phone call or even a hand-written note, rather than an email to give it a more personal touch.

Clients want to feel valued, to be recognised for their decision to appoint and stay with you. Client listening can help you to do that – often, when I ask interviewees how my client makes

them feel valued, their response is something along the lines of 'being asked to participate in this exercise'. Showing your clients you care what they think and feel, demonstrates your commitment to building a strong and long-lasting relationship.

Do any of these resonate with you? I'd love to know.

More to follow in October and, in the meantime, please do get in touch – not for child rearing advice though!



Best wishes,

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