

Understanding and Working with Clients

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TBE

2012 AASHTO Subcommittee on Right of Way and Utilities Conference

Marriott Waterfront Hotel – Portland, Oregon
April 29 to May 3, 2012



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What is a Client?

- Client
 - The party for which professional services are rendered
 - A customer or patron: clients of a hotel
 - A person using the services of an agency
 - One that depends on the protection of another

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What Else is a Client?

- Source of future business?
- Someone who may recommend you to others (or not recommend you)?
- A partner?
- A friend?

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Who Has Clients?

- Attorneys
- Engineers
- Financial partners
- Fast food employees
- Hotel staff
- Parents
- All of us

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Client Expectations

- Expectations about service
- Expectations about schedule
- Expectations about results
- Expectations about costs
- Expectations about communication
- Expectations about always being there

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Working with Clients

- Have a clear understanding of your clients' requirements/expectations and confirm in writing. Your services should follow the agreed upon scope, schedule and pricing.
- Have a clear understanding of what your client is to provide, interim approvals and the time needed for such approvals.

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Working with Clients

- Keep your clients fully informed
 - Regularly update your clients to maintain a mutual understanding and progress of the services being provided.
 - Return phone calls and emails promptly- even if you can't completely answer questions immediately, acknowledge receipt

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Working with Clients

- Use proper mode of communication
 - Face to face
 - Telephone
 - Emails
 - Texting



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Working with Clients

- Listen, Listen, and Listen some more.
 - Listen carefully to what your client tells you
 - Listen carefully to what your client doesn't tell you
 - Understand what is important to your client
 - Repeatedly ascertain what your client wants and doesn't want

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Working with Clients

- Establish a positive working relationship- poorly managed interpersonal relations may cloud crucial discussions with clients. Also, a positive relationship fosters an environment where you and your client are mutually responsible to each other.

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Demanding and Difficult Clients

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Demanding and Difficult Clients

- Type in “Clients” in Google and one of the top search choices is “Clients from Hell”
- Type in “Working with Clients” and your top choices include “working with clients with borderline personality disorder” and “working with clients that are intoxicated”

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Demanding and Difficult Clients

- Me: If we could get a copy of your logo we are finished here and can begin our work.
- Client: Sure, it's on this USB stick.
- Me: What file format is it- eps or ai?
- Client: No I told you it's on the USB stick.
- It was at this point I noticed their logo, about 8mm wide, printed on the stick.

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Demanding and Difficult Clients

- Client: I don't see that link.
- Me: What page are you on right now?
- Client: I'm not on a page. I'm on the internet.

From: www.clientsfromhell.net



Who Has Demanding Clients?

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Categories of Difficult Clients

- Angry/hostile
- Vengeful/with a mission
- Over-involved/obsessive
- Dependent
- Secretive/deceitful/dishonest



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Categories of Difficult Clients

- Depressed
- Mentally ill
- The difficult client with the difficult project
- The client who is unwilling to accept/follow/believe any of your advice

(List comes from “Dealing with difficult clients” by Carole Curtis, BA, LLB)



Characteristics of Demanding Clients

- Unrealistic expectations- expectations that cannot be met by ANYONE
- Clients who would have been dissatisfied regardless of the product and service delivered
- Aggressive scheduling/last minute requests

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Characteristics of Demanding Clients

- Clients who continually change direction
- Clients that communicate poorly
- Clients that are overly critical



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Understanding a Demanding Client

- Perception versus Reality
- Demands that your clients are facing
- What motivates demanding clients
- Past projects/experiences (with other providers)
- Personalities

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How to Work with Demanding Clients

- Plotting revenge
- Screaming and crying
- Fleeing the country
- Joining the intoxicated client at the bar



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How to Work with Demanding Clients

- Maintain your professionalism
- Be patient, calm, and courteous
- Clarify issues- “I am unclear why you are saying that; tell me more.”
- Be explicit and clear in your communications

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How to Work with Demanding Clients

- Obtain assistance when requested or needed
- Be sure the client knows who to contact
- Look at the situation from the client's point of view
- Document and file client communications

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How to Work with Demanding Clients

- Protect/enhance your image- don't let a false image be created.
- Encourage realistic expectations.
- Don't hide issues
- Be honest and straightforward

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How to Work with Demanding Clients

- Alleviate their stress and concern- what are their hot button issues?
- Listen to your staff. They may know more about the client's issues or mood.
- Alleviate your stress
- You can't always please everyone. So who can you please instead?

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What if the Client Wants Something that is wrong?

- Does this affect the safety of the public?
- What is the risk? To the client? To you?
- Is it really wrong?
- Disclaimers
- Documentation



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Delighting Your Clients

- Commit explicitly to delighting clients as your goal, not just satisfying or serving, or just delivering services
- Work in an iterative fashion; delight clients early and often.
- Give your client the UNEXPECTED.

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Delighting Your Clients

- Understand what they want- beyond just the current project. What are their goals? What drives them?
- Make them look good to their boss!!
- Follow-up during and after projects. Find solutions for things that didn't go as planned.

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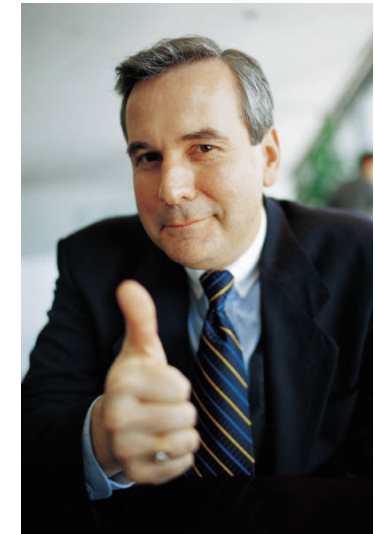


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Delighting Your Clients

- Delighted Clients will be repeat Clients and will recommend you to your future Clients.



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Thank You!

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