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White Paper

7^{1/2} Steps To Creative Excellence. A Guide For Clients.



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"I have learned that you can't have good advertising without a good client and that you can't keep a good client without good advertising." —Leo Burnett

Obviously, sustaining a successful client / agency relationship is a two-way street. Neither the client nor the agency should exert all the effort. Agencies want to serve clients well and aim to always produce the best work possible. Clients can help. Below are a handful of simple attitudes and behaviors that clients can adopt to foster a highly-energized creative environment for great work to occur.

- 1. Create a spirit of partnership and mutual trust** – It goes without saying that mutual respect must be demonstrated at all times at all levels. Avoid the superior / subordinate relationship characterized by an atmosphere of mistrust, lack of respect for the agency's expertise, and undercurrents of intimidation. The best creative is only developed in the absence of fear. Do not try to do the agency's job for them. If you treat agency personnel as adversaries, you will be treated as adversaries in return.
- 2. Be the best client they have** – Top agency people can usually choose the clients they wish to work with and refuse to work with clients they do not respect. In a way, you have to deserve the best people – and you want them to fight to be on your business. You must be proud of your company, and you must make them proud to work on your business. You must be progressive in everything you do. It helps if you also communicate to the agency how important you know their work is to the health of your company, and how much you care that you get their very best work. You must not only show that you care personally, but that the organization also cares deeply at all levels.
- 3. Define clear objectives for the work** – Failure to agree upon precise objectives can doom the creative process from the start. Simplicity of strategy and clarity of direction will ensure that everyone stays on the same track. It is demoralizing to work against an assignment and then find that it is not what the company intended or wanted. Vague direction causes creative frustration. Be sure everyone agrees with the strategy and stick to it.
- 4. Allow the agency to immerse itself in your business** – Exposing agency staff to inside information (warts and all) can cost more money (in service time) and involves some level of risk. However, great clients permit agencies to see the whole picture because they realize more innovative thinking and a better creative product will be the result.

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5. **Ask for excellence and allow experimentation** – Client management should always ask for and demand the very best from its agency people. If the work seems inadequate, be clear and do not allow mediocre ideas to linger on. Don't settle for the "safe" or "ordinary". It's okay to be a little afraid, a little worried, and a little nervous about the idea. Safe rarely wins. Don't get bogged down in detail and nit-picking. This is vitally important, but it is not easy. You must look beyond the obvious and provide the leadership to find the truly "big" creative ideas. Agencies have the talent to come up with them, but you and your people must sensitize yourselves to recognize the big idea when it appears.
6. **Streamline approval procedures** – An excessive number of meetings is debilitating to the agency and indeed, often causes the entire client / agency team to lose sight of objectives and the big idea. Also, too many people involved in the decision-making process clouds their focus. You must not frustrate and de-motivate the creative people by multiple meetings or successive levels of approval. And if you don't like something, say so. Be specific. Don't ask for a new execution just because, "This one doesn't do it for me."
7. **Personal involvement of top management of client and agency** – The top management of both client and agency should maintain an open door policy. They should both be aware of the other's needs and be able to discuss honestly and openly any and all mutual problems and opportunities.
- 7 1/2. **Ensure agency profitability** – Agencies are also businesses and as such are in business to make a profit. If you are profitable to them it further ensures that you will be able to get the very best people and their greatest effort on your behalf.

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A successful client / agency relationship is the foundation for great creative. Clients that promote open communication and seek feedback to ensure the relationship continues to meet the expectations of all involved are more likely to win in the marketplace...and achieve a partnership that endures over time.