

Of Equal Importance

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Why valuing your service providers and classing them as a client is important..(An observation from 32 years business experience in most areas: retail, manufacturing, sales and service.)

In business we tend to value our clients because they provide us with our cash flow and profit. Perceiving service providers as a valuable asset is not as common. They are the people that take away the cash flow and profit in many minds of business owners.

It always astounds us - when everything goes right as service providers we are treated with respect and cooperation. However when things go wrong all hell breaks loose!

Often service providers are judged on one incident that has gone wrong and all the good times of the past are forgotten. Reactions to perceived "bad" service in the market place can range from withholding payment, anger and sometimes insulting emails or phone calls. Whilst it is understandable that this is created by frustration, it does nothing to solve the situation. The word "perceived" is interesting. In most disputes there are two different perceptions therefore two different realities. No one goes out of their way to give bad service and most people respond to a rational discussion to come to a healthy conclusion.

When discussing this phenomenon with a very successful businessman, he stated "I treat my services providers as I do my clients because without them I could not provide the service that I give to my clients."

In business we all have our favorite clients - these are the people who get the best service. They are given first dibs at scarce product, are given leeway in payment terms when cash flow is tight and are generally contacted the most because it is a pleasant experience. These clients are the ones who treat their service providers as they would their clients. They are the ones that realize service providers are an integral part in their business. If a valued relationship exists, neither party is looking to assign blame when things go wrong but instead are focused on finding a workable solution.

An interesting case of valuing your service provider played out recently when two neighbour's used the same builder to erect new rooms above their adjoining garages. One neighbour treated the contractors with respect and allowed them to get on with what they do best and watched and listened in horror as the other neighbour treated them like paid servants. There was no appreciation shown when they were working extremely hard to do a great job. Every little detail was dealt in an aggressive manner.

What transpired was that the contractors became resentful on how they were being treated resulting in them providing the minimum service that was required from them and nothing extra. If that neighbour had treated them with the respect and politeness they deserved perhaps the outcome would have been achieving more creative build that the neighbour who treated them well received.

The secret to service provider/client relationships is communication. A good relationship with your service providers can be very beneficial if you value them. How you treat them is the service you get.

By Gaye Harford, Recruitment Director