

CLIENTELLIGENCE

How Superior Client Relationships
Fuel Growth and Profits

17 Secrets for Superior Results

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CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER 1

Commitment to Help

Say, “I Do” to Your Clients

Question: *In a bacon and egg breakfast, what’s the difference between the chicken and the pig?*

Answer: *The chicken is involved, but the pig is committed.*

Most of the time, being called a pig is not a compliment. But if clients think you are a pig, it is the ultimate seal of approval.

The caller ID flashed on the ringing phone and Jonathan, the Chief Legal Officer of a Fortune 100 company, immediately tensed. The display showed 10:06 AM and Jonathan knew the number was his law school buddy, Lori, now working at the Securities and Exchange Commission. Jonathan picked up the receiver and said a friendly hello.

Lori shared pleasantries, but the tone quickly changed. Lori informed Jonathan that the agency, after months of study, was preparing to launch a formal investigation into the company’s accounting practices. Immediately, Jonathan envisioned the disclosures, the inevitable drop in the stock price of his company, the exodus of customers, and the harsh scrutiny of the company’s shareholders. His face went white thinking of the bill attached to managing the investigation and follow-up rulings.

Jonathan wanted to move quickly and decisively. Once he hung up with Lori, he immediately called his go-to legal advisor, Bart. Bart was a litigator at one of the 20 largest law firms in the world. The 2 had worked together for more than 15 years and there was no voice Jonathan wanted to hear more. When Bart picked up the phone, Jonathan shared the news.

Bart, understanding the gravity of the situation, shared his sympathies and quickly reminded Jonathan, “SEC and accounting investigations aren’t in my wheelhouse. However, I don’t want you to worry. Last year, we brought on a new partner who has tremendous experience in these types of matters.” Bart went on, “This guy is based out of our West Coast office, so he’s a few hours behind us. I’ll give his assistant a ring and have an appointment scheduled for the 3 of us as quickly as possible.” Before they hung up, Bart confided, “Now, please understand. This partner’s going rate starts at \$1,100 an hour—I just want you to be prepared for a little sticker shock.”

The 2 hung up. Jonathan stared at the phone, afraid it would ring again. He knew his CEO would be calling any minute demanding an action plan and Jonathan had nothing. He reached for the phone and dialed Deborah, another attorney he had worked with recently on a handful of major matters. Jonathan hoped Deborah would have some quick advice for him.

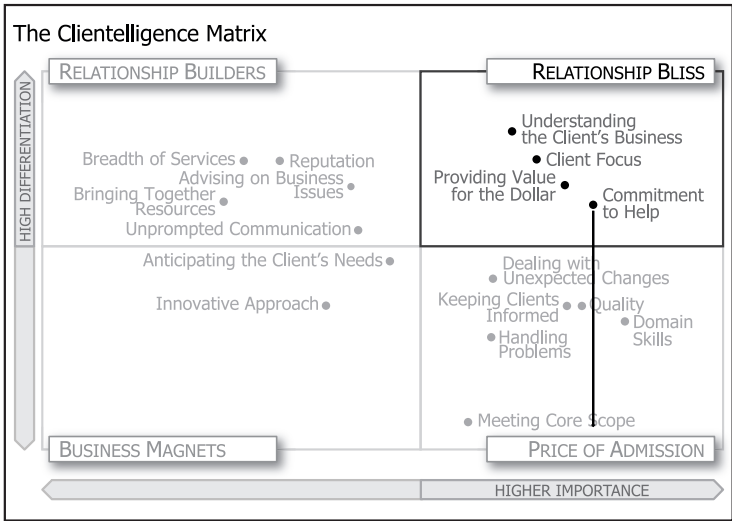
Once patched through to Deborah, Jonathan began retelling the details of the SEC decision. Deborah quietly listened and afterwards asked if she could put Jonathan on hold for a few minutes. Jonathan placed the call on speaker, muted the line, and responded to a handful of emails while he waited. 11 minutes later, Deborah returned to the line and introduced Jonathan to Gary and Susan—2 experienced SEC attorneys ready to start brainstorming next steps with Jonathan.

Post Script: Later in the afternoon, Bart’s assistant called back to schedule a meeting between Jonathan, Bart, and their West Coast SEC attorney. Jonathan was on his second conference call with Deborah and her partners and didn’t return the call.

Jonathan ultimately spent more than \$33 million dollars with Deborah’s firm.

This a true story and one I’ve heard many times—admittedly on a smaller scale than in the tale of Jonathan and Bart.

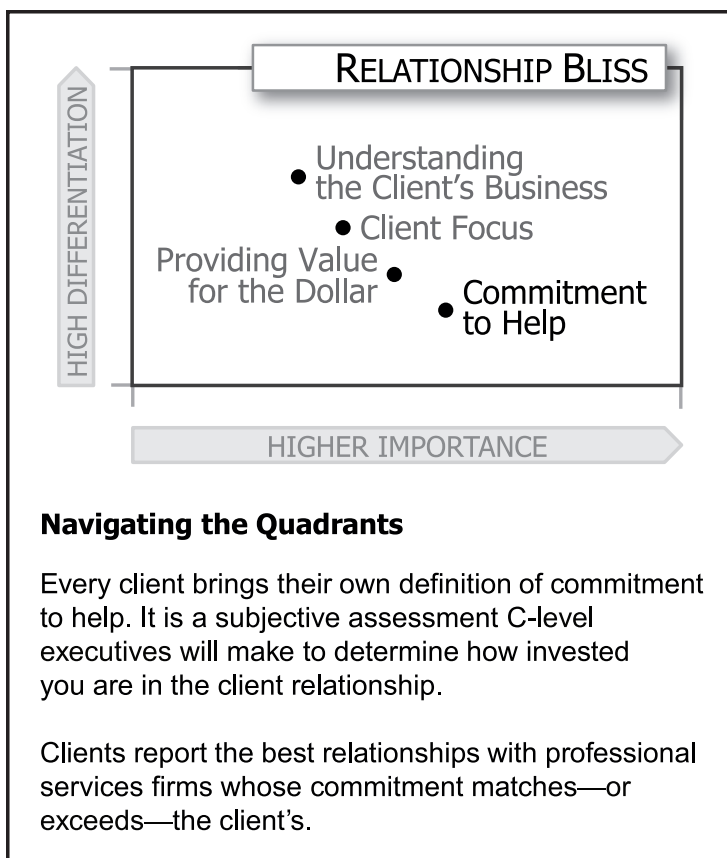
Poor Bart. He’s a pig in hiding. His heart was in the right place, but he sent out a bevy of unintended messages suggesting he was a chicken.



Commitment to help is the single most important factor to C-level executives when they evaluate and hire professional services firms.

In the Clientelligence Matrix above, you see commitment to help is more important (further to the right) than everything but domain skills, and domain skills—whether or not you can even do the work—as we discuss in Chapter 5, have no influence on the relationship unless these skills are lacking.

Your commitment to help clients will make—or break—the most meaningful client relationships.



While every client will define commitment in a slightly different way, they will all ask themselves the same question in order to test your investment:

“Are you here to bill hours *or* are you here to truly help me solve my problem/reach my goal?”

This is a black or white question—all or nothing. You are either the most committed, or you aren't. Your clients will look at the verbal and non-verbal cues you send out. Every action,

inaction, response, and behavior will be analyzed and, whether intentional or not, will speak volumes about your commitment.

Do your clients see you as a pig or a chicken?

In order to prove your pig-ness, a professional must go beyond the boundaries of a typical commercial relationship. Call it engagement, investment, or commitment—clients want you to match (or exceed) their own levels of:

- Urgency
- Energy
- Perceived investment of time, money, and psychic energy

While Deborah, in the above anecdote, addressed Jonathan's most pressing need in an urgent manner, Bart was talking about rates and overlooked the client's need for immediate action. Bart was being helpful, not committed.

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How committed are you?

Superhero Pigs

The most committed professionals are always looking for opportunities to help. These superheroes are easy to spot (the pig wearing a cape is hard to miss) because they:

- Have constant open communication with clients. Superheroes seem to know everything about their clients—both professionally and personally—from business objectives, new work needs, personal challenges, to the names of their clients' dogs. Superheroes are always gathering information and using it to anticipate client needs and avoid lurking issues.
- (Seemingly) never sleep. Superheroes don't stop until the client's goal has been met—no matter how difficult or time constrained the project may be. There is little room for compromise in urgent situations.
- Take bullets for their clients. Egos take a back seat when you are proving your commitment to clients. When things go wrong, superheroes quickly step up and take accountability (and offer solutions to correct the situation). Not only does this approach save time, it lets the client save face with top management. Superheroes are true allies.
- Go the extra mile—or 10. Superheroes pull off seemingly amazing feats to help clients succeed. Success goes beyond delivering outcomes. Clients are looking for personal success and superheroes get them there by helping with anything from being published, to teaching positions, to the best table at top restaurants for a special

anniversary. Superheroes pull in favors to demonstrate commitment to their clients.

- Are direct—not contrary. Superheroes will tell clients the truth, no matter how unpopular the opinion may be. These advisors take their responsibility as guides seriously. Their experience, knowledge, and understanding drive recommendations. They don't simply recite what they hope the client wants to hear.

Power Mongers

At the core, the power monger's commitment rivals the superhero's. They leap into action, mobilizing resources, ensuring deadlines are met, and guaranteeing the client's goal is met as promised. However, power mongers have trouble demonstrating their commitment to help on a regular basis. When the water gets hot, they perform best, but on a more routine basis they tend to lose focus on true commitment.

Another difference between power mongers and superheroes is their communication style with clients. Whereas superheroes have developed an informal, easy communication style with clients, power mongers—enjoying the heat of the battle—frequently forget to keep clients in the loop. Progress and budget updates happen when deadlines roll around and bills are submitted. The client ends up being the last to know about a change in budget or scope.

Power mongers often turn into superheroes once trained to share their considerable prowess, talent, and thought processes with the client.

Contractors

Do you find yourself boasting, "I gave the client just what they asked for—and the project was on time and on budget!"

Contractors are highly skilled and use their skills to fulfill the scope of work for the task at hand. They bring little emotion to their work—feeling concerned with getting the job done—but not always matching the client's urgency concerning a

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project. Communication is a tool to keep projects on track—nothing more, nothing less.

Without urgency, contractors find themselves rarely considered for high-value, complex, or risk-oriented work.

High-powered Lemmings (HPLs)

HPLs are your yes-men. They look to clients for direction, advice, and, problematically, for solutions. At the slightest hint of controversy, HPLs will hide behind the client, asking for their thoughts on next steps (but never offering their own ideas).

Resistors

Naysayers, progress blockers, and Debbie Downers. Resistors seem to always find a reason for why something can't be done—instead of figuring out how to get it done. These dangerous professionals see the world fraught with risk, strict rules, and consequences when rules are broken. In fact, their commitment to the rules supersedes their commitment to the client.

However, even resistors have a role. Resistors are often technically savvy and have a keen ability to project the roadblocks ahead, but they offer little in the way of solutions. This makes the resistor an excellent sounding board for superheroes and power mongers—but on a stand-alone basis, they rarely incite commitment.

Maintaining superhero status is hard work, but they are the competition you are up against every day. Anything less than *Superhero Pig* is *Chicken the Villain*.

Buy *Clientelligence*:

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Michael Rynowecer, as President and Founder of The BTI Consulting Group, looks at every angle of the professional services relationship, starting with the client perspective, to drive growth. This fascination has driven him to direct, conduct and analyze more than 14,000 one-on-one interviews with C-level executives to define their expectations, needs, priorities, preferences, hiring decisions and opinions of the professionals with whom they work. From this research BTI identified the 17 activities statistically proven to drive superior client relationships. These unique methods and approaches have propelled over 25 years of fact-based research on buyers and sellers of professional services. BTI conducts more independent research on how clients acquire, manage, and evaluate their professional services providers than virtually anyone.

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