Ep 78: 4 Relationship-Limiting Mistakes Clients Make- The Insider Edition
Building the relationship to create better work

o Treating the agency like a vendor instead of a partner.
  o When we left the "Mad Men" era, the world was able to access all of the creative tools with the advent of computer software, some of the magic and control that the agencies had was gone. Agencies have had to reinvent themselves ever since.
  o One of the issues with this shift is that along the way, agencies not only lost any sort of upper hand, they were deemed "demoted" to the role of a vendor. This does the opposite of setting up the agency to be a partner. It becomes an "order-taker" mentality and makes it seem as though it is very one-sided.
  o This is not always the case and not every client does this. The point here is to caution against "assigning tasks" without rationale, bigger picture explanation or a dialogue between agency and client. Agencies thrive when they feel like they are a part of the client team and are by nature creative minds and big picture thinkers. When this is thwarted, especially from the very beginning, their energy tanks and the desire to work with you on your business goes away.
  o If you feel like your agency is "phoning it in", maybe take a step back and assess whether you are in this situation, even if you inadvertently landed here.
  o Treating agencies like partners doesn't mean deferring to them. A lot of times, we on the client side would withhold valuable perspective, thoughts, ideas because we didn't want to interfere with the agency's creative process or "do their job for them". What happens in not sharing these is that when the agency comes back, we are inadvertently looking for our ideas and are still holding onto those as being the "right way". Agencies can't read your mind. Best ideas come from collaborative ideation.
o Limiting the agency's exposure too much.
  o Briefs are hugely important to the process because they can make sure that everyone is tracking and hold all parties accountable. But the brief cannot do everything and if a project isn't set up correctly from the start, then even the brief cannot help. Specific tips that get things off to the right start are:
    ➢ Aligning on the information the agency desires and the client believes they need and agreeing.
    ➢ Identifying all key stakeholders on the client side and who will play what role.
    ➢ Setting up a process for the project and key milestones.
    ➢ Open lines of communication. You know the expression about "the best laid plans". It exists for a reason. There is no "set it and forget it" in relationships. And people are not perfect. Just as you wouldn't want the agency to go off and work for 3 months without your input, we have to feel like we have a trusted partner to go to and someone to address any issues with. Agencies want to work for clients that want to work with them.
    ➢ When client's limit, it is usually for 3 reasons:
      • Speed- More decision makers generally means extended timelines in trying to get those people engaged.
      • Focus- agencies cater to the highest person in the room versus what is in the brief or being directed by their client lead.
      • Simplicity- More cooks in the kitchen generally creates more swirl. It isn't generally ego like most think.
o Heavy handedness in the work product.
  o When a client tries to insert themselves too much into the process of creating the work and the end result it is not helpful to the agency team. This is when the client oversteps their bounds and wants to prescribe- to the first point about treating the agency like a vendor- what the solution is and how they want it created. This is where the client needs to trust the process and the brief they developed.
  o Here are some of the big "no-no's" agencies do not like:
    ➢ A desire to be in all the internal meetings and actively participate. Agencies have a process and it does not include the client micromanaging the work.
    ➢ The feeling that "they know best" on all things related to their business. The client knows their business better than the agency ever will, but the agency knows the outside, consumer/customer-facing lens which serves as a complement to your in-depth knowledge of the business from the inside-out. The magic happens when these two complement each other in equal parts.
    ➢ A list of "must-haves" so long that we cannot be creative. This one campaign/project/execution or even brand development cannot solve every issue of your business or be a single point of communication for every interaction. It is why brand and marketing campaigns exist.
    ➢ Full orchestration of every presentation to client teams. Yes, you should be aligned, but the agency has to be able to present the work against their creative process, get the feedback to make revisions and set the team and agency up for success.
o Providing feedback that is not helpful.
  o Remember that your agency is made up of people and yes, creatives can be sensitive. Be kind where you can.
  o On the other hand, if the agency has not delivered against the brief, you have the authority to "give it to them". Respectful, objective feedback that is actionable and tied to the brief is necessary if you are going to get to a good end result.
  o Do not provide non-actionable feedback. Agencies are not mind-readers and cannot predict the future. Here's how to provide good feedback:
    ➢ Reference the brief, this is your bible and it keeps you objective.
    ➢ Avoid subjective phrases. Be specific and use actionable statements.
    ➢ Take the time you need to provide focused feedback.
    ➢ Take the time to explain feedback.
    ➢ Be accessible and collaborative.
    ➢ Build the relationship.

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