4 Roles Client Service Should Play in Serving Business

with Chris Wallen, Director, Client Partnership of Barefoot

- Keeping the client in the room at all times.
    - The client cannot (and should not) be physically in the room with the agency team at all times. This is counterproductive to everyone involved, and it is important to note that the client has their 'day job' and a whole host of responsibilities beyond working with the agency.
    - The unique role of the client service team is to ensure that the client's voice is loud and clear, but also appropriate to the expected scope of work and in balance and consideration of the agency team. Can it be a tenuous balance? Absolutely. This is a "not just what you say, but the way in which you say it" situation. The client service team is often responsible for "translating" what the client says into what that means for the work, and then holding everyone accountable to the expectations that are set.
    - A strong client service team is an expert at taking in all of what the client says, sifting through to what is applicable to the assignment at hand, and presenting that to the agency team in a clear, concise, and relevant way. Being choiceful is KEY. The agency team will likely push back and say it is too restrictive, at which point the CS team knows they are doing their job!
- Challenging the client's beliefs and perspective.
    - Challenging client beliefs and perspective is an art form and must be done in a very considerate, respectful way.
    - BUT, this is hugely important and it must be done. What the client provides has to be interpreted by client services and distilled down to what the agency team needs to meet the objectives of the work successfully. The other aspect of the client interaction is to push back where the agency has different POV'S or ideas for what should be accomplished.
    - Clients know more about their business than an agency could ever dream of knowing. The agency knows a little about a lot of different things and the complimentary knowledge is what gets to the very best solutions. The debate gets to better, stronger work at the end of the day.
    - The truth of the matter is that not all clients like to be challenged. At FRp, we opt out of those clients because we don't believe we can do the best work possible. This is a watch out in the CS position.
    - You need to know your client and hedge accordingly. Are they a little conservative, give them what they want and then give them an alternative.
- Having a clear understanding of the business and its goals.
    - While the client will know more about their business than the agency, that does not excuse the agency and specifically the client service team from having a strong, clear understanding of the business and its overall goals.
    - The CS experience can fall apart when this doesn't exist and the CS team is too tied to "creative solutions" only vs. what is best for the business. Unfortunately, this is where the agency can get into trouble and be seen as tone-deaf as they recommend things that do not make sense for what the client's business is trying to achieve.
    - The business' goals should be used as evaluation criteria for the work that the agency presents, and it is the job of the CS team to ensure those goals are part of the brief and overall project objectives.
    - You need to getg and be open to real, honest feedback. And not just say you are and then go behind your client contacts back. Take the feedback as data not blatant disrespect for your creative chops or intelligence. But it should be respectful.
- Seeking opportunities to make the business stronger.
    - A strong client service team does all of the previous points and can then get to this one. If they are keeping the client in the room, pushing back where appropriate, and they know the client's business, they are able to think strategically and proactively about the business and how to make it stronger WITH the work the agency does/is capable of doing. (This is an important distinction- we are not saying the CS team should be trying to give perspective on business decisions outside the realm of their influence/applicability.)
    - Clients LOVE proactive ideas from their agencies, but again, they have to be grounded in the business goals and objectives.
    - Don't just do what is asked, but find ways to show that you are thinking about their business, you care, and you are an extension of their team vs. just a vendor.

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