

Client service: Five ways to get what you want

 By [Sid Peimer](#)

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Taking a brief is a misnomer. That's as dangerous as taking candy from a stranger (in a long coat). You are sitting in front of the client because he/she wants something. And it's not a Loerie...

However, what the client wants, and what the client needs, are two completely different things. The goal of the meeting is not to *take* the brief, but to *discover* it - and the only way you can do that is to accurately define the problem. "We need to do a campaign for Widget 1" is not discovering the brief or defining the problem. I know the outcome is going to be a campaign, but the efficacy of the campaign will differ markedly when you go beyond taking the brief - to identifying the problem. The real problem.

I know we don't like to have problems in life, but you need to see the word here in a positive light. And solving problems (because you know you can) will get you out of bed with a lot more spring in your step than taking briefs. Here's where you come in with your most powerful weapon: the question 'why?'

Tact can work wonders

However, the direct approach isn't always the best and sometimes we need to disguise our 'whys' as 'don't you think?', 'what would, in your opinion, be the result if?' etc. There's nothing worse than someone sitting at your briefing going why, why, why. The next thing you expect to hear is "Are we there yet?"

Although the client has the want (that you want to satisfy), your job is to discover the need, and then to clearly define the problem. That's what it's all about. If you have defined the problem accurately, then everyone's free. The client is free to have received added value from you, planning is free to work on an insight, media is free to get creative and creative is free to go to the parties at the Loeries.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest brief. If you get it wrong at the start, we're all buggered (in the non-Australian sense).

Here are five ways to help you define the problem:

1. Ask why
2. Question the goal - how will you know you've succeeded? Having produced a campaign is an outcome not a result.
3. Get a sense of perspective - see where the brand fits in, in terms of all its components and relative to other brands in the same category. If the client says "We have no competition", you have my permission to slap them.

4. Know what you don't know. For example, getting into media at the initial brief is outside your domain. If media get an accurate description of the problem, they will give you a more effective (and exciting) media plan.
5. Find out what's keeping the client up at night (other than his/her spouse) and I promise you, you'll have a friend for life.

ABOUT SID PEIMER

A seasoned and insightful executive with multisector experience in roles as diverse as senior management, strategic planning and copywriting. I am a qualified pharmacist with an MBA from UCT. I am also an accomplished keynote speaker and presenter.

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