

Perfecting the human element of service delivery

By [Doug Crawford](#)

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Delivering a quality service can make or break a business, especially those in the professional services space where the product is the service. The level of service provided to clients can become a key differentiator and, more often than not, determines whether a client will partner with a service provider for the long-term or, at a minimum, refer the service provider to other potential clients.



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There are many mechanisms available to support a company's service-delivery goals and effective implementation of these may be critical in achieving those goals. They include technology and systems, standard operating procedures, industry best practices and standards body certifications.

However, many companies neglect to recognise the impact of the softer elements of service delivery: the human element. Interpersonal relationships can take a mediocre experience and turn it into something exceptional. People like to do business with those whom they trust and trust is an emotional response to a positive (or negative) experience with another individual. Having all the checks and balances in place cannot guarantee a positive outcome if interaction at a personal level isn't taken care of effectively.

The obvious answer to this is to hire the right people but this doesn't really tell us much. If competence is assured, what are some of the key behavioural characteristics of individuals required to deliver a quality service?

Show a sense of urgency

Clients want to know that you are taking them seriously. This can best be done by showing a sense of urgency, which means understanding and acknowledging their requests or concerns, acting immediately and providing regular feedback.

Be reliable

Reliability is a requirement for trust. Building strong relationships requires us to honour our commitments, whether made in passing conversation or as part of a larger project plan. Simple things, such as not returning a phone call when promised, not arriving for a meeting and lack of attention to detail resulting in a rework, can erode the trust in relationship. If you can't honour a commitment, then explain the circumstances, provide alternatives and present a revised plan of action that is agreeable to all parties.

Be objective

Emotional biases are typically triggered by our past experiences or when challenged. They may result in being defensive, sugar coating or making unreasonable promises that can't be kept. Do not let emotional biases get in the way of presenting information. Always present the facts as you understand them, then, and only if asked or obliged, provide your opinion based on the facts. As professionals, we owe it to our clients to first present factual information, irrespective of how we feel about a particular situation.

Communicate frequently

When it comes to delivering a quality service, keep all those involved in the project informed with regular and frequent communication. This reiterates a 'sense of urgency' and shows that your client's requirements are a priority.

Value over ego

Be humble in your interactions with a client and spend more time listening than talking. This opens the door for a better understanding of their needs and builds a stronger interpersonal relationship, which, in turn, builds more trust. Going into a discussion hoping to learn something rather than teach something, ultimately positions you to provide more value to your client's business in the long-term.

Those businesses that continue to prioritise technology and processes over the human element to address service delivery goals will always fall short of delivering a quality service to their clients. Assuming you have a solid product and the ability to complete the job, it is the quality of the interpersonal experiences that leave a lasting impression and build a better relationship.

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