

Newsletter # 21: Service delivery - highlighting some pluses and minuses

A recent experience gives insights into the three main types of service delivery and how we can better manage that delivery and client expectations.

Relevance: for providers of services – who want to do the job well.

1. The consultative Collaborator!

Stewart has a strong client base with a team of 8 working for him. Two of these are good project managers and this allows Stewart to do more thinking about his business and more relationship building. He still has about an hour a day doing the work himself to maintain his perspective of what his clients want at the detail level, and of what his employees and sub-contractors need to do for those clients.

Stewart spent a lot of time asking me what I wanted. He asked me more than once, “If I get this job, how will it all look, how will it work, what do YOU want Ian?” This was soon reflected in his quote which gave me three options – allowing differences in outcomes and in cost of project. One of the ideas was excellent and it simplified the project without losing on quality. (*Add value*)

Stewart drives a new smart vehicle, signalling to me that his price could be high. It also signalled success. His bid came in one day later than promised but it was at the lower end of the range – only 10% dearer than the lowest quote and half the highest quote.

Stewart won the job and while his team did the work, he was there each day (*Be visible – clients value what they see*). He had earlier rung to say he would be a day late in starting as another project had delayed him – (*make clear the process, make clear the outcome, eliminate surprises or, if you like, manage the risk and manage client expectations*).

Stewart put more people on the job to make up the time and when there was a small issue about what was included in his quote, he let me have the win (*negotiate with a view to the relationship*). After a couple of days he asked me some questions beyond the scope of the project and got to know me a little. I have since referred him and he has won engagements from two of my ‘network’. (*Get to know the person*).

2. The distant Expert!

Chris persuaded me to purchase equipment that was significantly more expensive than the alternative suppliers. She did this by coming to the site on the day I first contacted her, advanced good reasons and my colleagues agreed with her. When I later decided to have some additional work done in her area, I was disappointed that she did DID NOT ASK HOW THE INSTALLATION had gone, even though she recommended the installer! (*Take time to do some form of Post Implementation Review - PIR*).

Chris' furtive reticence (*yes - it did look furtive*) - and lack of personal acknowledgement (*underinvestment in the affective domain*), had me wondering if I was being duped somewhere in the process. I am now satisfied that Chris' advice was very good but if she were to acknowledge her relationship with her client, she may earn their trust a little sooner and win a referral or two in the process! I also might have ordered the additional work at the outset. (*We are as good as our last job and we all need referrals; trusted providers are given bigger assignments*).

There are times when the expert approach unmodified is most appropriate - however it can always be improved by recognising that there is a human element in any transaction - how people feel - this is the 'affective domain' .

3. The clock-watching Pair of Hands!

One sub-contractor rushed in, did the job, cleaned up as to 95%, and then rushed off. He ignored two minor problems that appeared as he did his work. I fixed them. I would never recommend him. He seemed to care more about getting in and out than he did about the job, his greeting was only to establish that he had the correct address and he didn't have a card although his vehicle was corporately badged in his own name. *(Too many to mention).*

4. The point!

It was interesting to be a consumer of (for me) significant fee based services - labour and IP content. As one who trains many providers of professionals services in aspects of service delivery, it was so apparent to see these providers conform to type. There is little doubt that the collaborative approach coupled with good strategy and administration - is appealing to clients. Read success stories in business and you see these themes repeated. Good managers are among their people - knowing what line operators and customers think; top consultants de-brief each other and have open conversations with their clients; employees in organisations that encourage such work practices have higher levels of engagement and better staff retention.

The jobs? Painting, carpeting and carpet laying. I could tell reasonably similar story with accountants and dentists! © Ian Benjamin, 2005

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Best wishes and good consulting or practising! – Ian Benjamin

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