

The Concept of Consistency

Professionals in many service-based organizations (including Credit Unions) have begun to replace aspects of 'chance' within their service delivery model with those offering greater degrees of 'certainty'. So why is so much time being invested to make this change? It's because it provides one of the single best return on investment. Also, customers more now than ever are demanding it and voting with their feet if service consistency isn't delivered. It has begun to distinguish the average organization from a thriving one.

The 3 Goals

As financial professionals, let's recap three very important business-development goals:

- To competitor-proof our ideal clients through the development of trusting relationships
- To uncover potential new business from within our existing portfolios based upon need
- To stimulate quality introductions with potential new clients

The concept of consistency has been proven to be the single most important factor in determining how introduce-able we are, and therefore ultimately contributes to our professional success.

The Perils of Inconsistency

Below is an example emphasizing just how significant consistency is when it comes to the prospects of receiving future introductions from your existing clients.

An individual had hired a contractor to renovate her house. When the job was completed, the individual came home that night to find three dozen roses on the new kitchen counter and a thank-you note from the contractor expressing his appreciation. The woman was suitably impressed and told the story about this gentleman contractor to everyone who would listen.

Not long after, she recommended the same contractor to a friend. Periodically, she and her friend would discuss how the renovations were coming along. The friend would update her and add that the contractor indeed did good work. The woman who introduced him would then say, "Just wait until he's finished," coyly hinting about the floral surprise once work was completed. After three weeks and several hints, the job was completed. When the friend called to vicariously enjoy her friend's surprise, guess what had happened? The contractor, despite doing a great job, had not left even one bouquet. The woman who had originally received the flowers felt, understandably, like somewhat of a fool when her friend asked, "So what gives? What's the big surprise?"

After her initial experience, the woman extolled the virtues of this contractor all over town. Every time the subject of renovations or flowers came up, she repeated the story because her expectations had initially been exceeded, and she wanted to brag about her experience. It was the best advertising in the world for the contractor.

Fast-forward to the second experience with her rose-less friend. Even though the contractor did a fine job in both scenarios, his inconsistency (the first client received flowers, the friend did not) led to disappointment. What does this mean? The woman who originally introduced him is now telling a story

of disenchantment about the second experience to anyone who will listen. For the contractor in this story, it is the worst possible advertising in the world.

By every appearance, this contractor had it made after he gave the first client the flowers. He was welcomed into this woman's inner circle and she was extolling his merits as a contractor to her friends, family and associates. The contractor probably would have also realized repeat business from this woman. Now, however, he will never receive repeat business, nor will he earn business from the introductions he is not going to get.

There are two possible responses to this story. You can say, "This really isn't fair to the contractor. He did a great job. The flower issue is minor in the context of the total job done and people shouldn't react this way." Or, you can acknowledge that people do act this way -- that little things are wildly important - and you can start to act consistently in your organization.

To summarize an old-adage about human nature, people will always talk about two things: those things that exceed their expectations, and those that fall below their expectations. (People do not usually discuss things that simply meet their expectations.) The second part of this adage states that if we are going to exceed expectations as part of our philosophy, we need to ensure we are consistent about it.

The Psychology behind Consistency

Whether you know it or not, your clients are already "connecting the dots" and determining what you do and when you do it. If there is a pattern of inconsistency, your clients will, at best, fail to introduce anyone else to your services. A more severe outcome of inconsistent behaviour is that your clients will simply seek the services of another professional in your field.

Most of us can think of someone who has been extremely successful in their business, even though we cannot see any obvious qualities or character traits that contribute to this success. We wonder: "How can that person be so successful?" We may even use the professional as a personal motivator, saying to ourselves "If he/she can succeed in this business, then anyone can!" This begs the question: what is their secret? How did they accomplish this? As boring as it sounds, the answer is usually the same. The professional had a plan and regardless of how simple or mundane it appeared on the surface, they tenaciously persevered with their plan. Ultimately, their plan bore fruit and their success is now apparent.

Two Simple Ideas

Here are two ways to make our client service more consistent, effective and valuable:

1. Provide Consistent Client Service

Follow exactly the types of service outlined for each client segment as identified by the Your Client Service Program. Deliver this service consistently, not just when there is time, but always. Ensure that your service is delivered in a timely and precise fashion by leveraging all the supporting systems and people - most importantly, your contact management system.

2. Be Consistent in Approach and Appearance

Review every aspect of your approach to ensure that everything is consistent. Check every nook and cranny where a client or prospect will experience your marketing and materials. Are you using brochures, letterhead, business cards and other marketing materials appropriately? Check your email and email templates to ensure they properly represent our approach and that they are properly branded and consistent with firm policies and procedures on client communication and organizational marketing standards.

Make sure clients are aware of the time that you have allotted for each consultation. When a client calls, always handle them in a similar manner and strive for a similar response time. To summarize, make the necessary changes to ensure that all aspects of the client experience are consistent and reflect what you as a professional and your organization want to reflect.

Your behaviour and that of everyone else at the organization impacts the client experience and creates expectations. Indeed, when you set a benchmark of expectations, you must be prepared to keep it. Otherwise, it can often hurt you more than help. Remember what happened to the building contractor who didn't consistently give his clients roses when he finished a job.

Be aware of any changes you make in your approach, no matter how small, and ask yourself how it will impact consistency. The benefit to all this hard work is that consistency creates trust. And with your clients' trust, anything is possible.