

Account Dog-paddling



It's fun watching kids learn to swim. They quickly master the dog paddle and thrash mightily in water above their heads to stay, we hope, safely afloat. Lots of splashing and churning, little arms and legs whirling like propellers, trying not to sink or gulp yucky water.

You know what? Lots of accounts are run that way. The goal is keep your head above water and hope you'll reach the other side of the pool before your arms fall off. It's account dog-paddling.

Our survey work proves this is a big issue for clients. "Proactivity," or more precisely lack of same, is the number one frustration clients have with their agencies. . . and usually the primary cause for seeking a new one.

So let's talk proactivity. You know what it means at an agency - it's observing what's going on, making decisions to improve and enhance things, and taking initiative to get it done. It's *not* being an account waiter - waiting for the client to call with an order or asking, "Do you want fries with that?"

In the spirit of proactivity, I'll take the initiative and suggest 6 things you can do, either individually or as an agency team, to move through the water with more speed and purpose.

1. Inside Account Reviews - This is an internal work-out session to take a candid look at how each piece of business on your roster can be improved. It goes like this. Gather everyone who works on Account X (do it for all accounts) every 3 months for a gloves-off meeting to discuss the financials, client marketing issues, how you're handling the account, and challenges and opportunities. Imperative: candor. Focus on how things have been proactively improved by the agency in the preceding 90 days. For more see [Quarterly Account Reviews](#).

2. Meta-thinking - Real progress is made when people are dissatisfied with commonplace results. Establish attainable objectives for account leadership, yes, but then exceed them. Rewards and incentives should be granted not just for hitting the marks, but going above and beyond. This way of thinking is what separates champions from also-rans.

3. Long Term Expectations - Agencies that successfully keep and grow accounts focus on what clients need not just today but 12 to 24 months from now. That's how you build lifetime value for your services. Have you asked your clients what their needs will be over the next 2 years so you're building bench strength and competencies now?

4. **Cross Pollination** - Get your best people working with the weakest teams. Stagnant accounts can dramatically accelerate when stronger people get involved and the less experienced learn from them. There's your training program!

5. **Everybody's Creative** - Coming up with fresh ideas is not the sole province of the "creative" department. It's everybody's business when you work in a company chartered to develop sticky ideas. Inspire people to think around corners. Publicly applaud innovators at every level and fuel more creativity by rewarding new thinking wherever you see it. What in your agency can't be improved with more creative thinking?

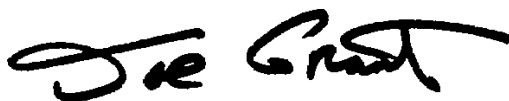
6. **Give To Get** - Agencies these days are so fearful of a skidding bottom line that they dismiss one of the best business-building tools available: giving something away for free as an investment in future business. Hey, it's not imprudent; in fact the opposite is true. Example: the restaurant manager who gifts a free dessert as a special thank-you or to amend for slow service creates a lifetime customer for the cost of a piece of pie. Don't be afraid to be strategically generous with your clients - it pays off in the long haul.

You've heard the old saw about the definition of insanity being doing the same thing every time but expecting different results? Proactivity is a way of thinking, a mindset based on believing there's always more or better you can do.

If you're toasted on an account it may seem daunting to will yourself to think this demanding way, but if you don't learn to go from dog-paddling to freestyle you'll never make it to the other side of the pool.

Not to mention how tired your arms and legs will get.

P.S. For a few more ideas about moving up to the next level take a look at [The Monkey Bars Law](#) in our website's Articles archive.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Grant". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.