

Cork The Whine



It's 1:30 and you breeze out the agency door bellowing, "I'm off to see those dumbass s.o.b.s again."

Ah, the much anticipated client meeting! When you arrive a half hour later to do business with them, what do you think happens to all that bad karma?

Our business is simple: agencies have relationships with clients to help them sell stuff. If you have a bad attitude about your clients, things just aren't going to go smoothly.

But they're jerks, you say? Well, OK. Here's some straight-ahead advice.

First of all, clients are your customers, for crissakes! Didn't you once beg these guys to become a client, promising them your first-born and swearing you'd practically live at their place? Just think about that for a moment. It's really all you need to know. *Clients are your customers.*

But if you harbor dark thoughts about what scoundrels these clients be you'll not only infect your colleagues and extinguish their passion for working on this account, you'll also plant an adverse message in your own subconscious mind, telling it you just don't care. When you don't care - even though you swear you're a pro - you dam the ability to generate good ideas, deplete your energy, and imperceptibly arrest your skyward career. Not good.

Now if you're an agency principal you have bigger issues. I've seen presidents bad mouth clients, post ridiculing e-mails and cartoons, and get up in front of Monday morning status meetings to publicly (but of course behind their backs) insult and drag down the very people they'd present a multimillion dollar campaign to that afternoon. Does this make sense? It certainly isn't what anyone would call professional.

Look, clients are rarely bad people. They're just ordinary folks much like you who find themselves having to work for a living and probably doing all they can to survive capricious management and pay their bills. They're your clients, your customers. Don't let your attitude cripple your ability to do business with them.

When you've got challenging clients, here's a simple trick for getting beyond yourself by doing something for yourself. Yes, that's a tortuous sentence but stick with me here.

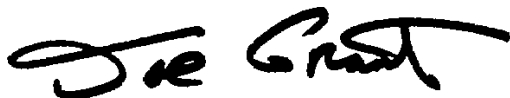
Give them a gift, if you will, of a little something extra - something they weren't expecting or didn't ask for. But do it without any expectation of being appreciated. Maybe they will thank you; then again maybe they won't. Thanks is beside the point here. You don't give a gift to get thanks - you do it because it's a good unselfish thing to do.

You might ask, why do something nice for someone who won't appreciate it? Simple answer (and herein lies the magic): because it's YOUR opportunity to behave one notch up on the scale of human beingness. You do it because it's a small act of polishing your own self. In a way, I suppose, that makes it selfish but a good kind of selfish.

Clients have good and bad days; some clients are more difficult to deal with than others. Your job is to maintain yourself on a personal high road, not to get drawn to their level. The really successful account people we know seamlessly maintain their professional mien.

In the end it's about the choices you make. You can choose to snarl and moan about what a lousy client they are, come home at night and kick the dog, take comfort in an extra scotch or two...

Or you can simply say it is what it is. And then concentrate on bringing your best game no matter the circumstances.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Grant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "G".