

My Client is a Jerk



Well, what client isn't sometimes? If you run an agency, manage an account, provide creative, or have anything whatsoever to do with clients you know sometimes they just don't behave the way you want them to.

Disclaimer: no two relationships are the same and we can't begin to address the galaxy of quirky client behavior you're likely to encounter. The generalities offered here are powered by the hope they'll inspire you to deal with the things you *can* control.

OK, what if you're tasked with babysitting an idiot?

First, stop calling them idiots, jerks, or worse. Denigrating clients signals how you expect your colleagues to behave. If you're negative and whiny you'll get that same reaction from your staff and you'll fuel a carping feeding frenzy. Besides, clients always pick up on the belittling. And that will only make things worse.

Sure, it feels momentarily therapeutic to vent about the client's unpredictable behavior, but pros stay above petty bitching. Don't pollute the relationship with trash talk – it serves no good purpose (We've written about this before – see *Cork the Whine*, Nov. 04 in the newsletter archive in the Articles section of our website).

Next, clear the air. Whether you're the agency chief or a junior AE, suck it up and conduct a serious meeting with your contentious client to hash out expectations and establish a collaborative plan for improvement. Sometimes younger people are fearful of going toe to toe with a squally client, afraid they'll get a withering psychological whippin'. The fact is if you can't face a challenging personality you're doomed to always be the little dog in the room. Dial direct and establish tangible milestones so both of you will see progress when it occurs. Read *Difficult Conversations* by Stone, Patton & Heen (Penguin); we use it often in our "marriage counseling" sessions with clients and agencies.

Get better at (a) what you do and (b) how you think. Face it, it doesn't take much to become an AE – most of us land in account work because we're somewhat glib, keep our hair combed, and can stifle inappropriate bodily noises.

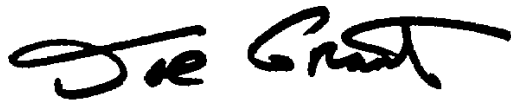
So how do we learn our craft? One of the most powerful rules for success you'll ever read is this: Study who's successful, then do what they do. Locate

someone whose success skills you covet and study everything about them. This isn't flattery – you want to emulate them so you can be as successful.

Now how do you get better at how you think? That's attitude and yup, whoever said attitude is everything was right. Start with a highly personal inventory of your thinking habits so you understand how you may be sabotaging your success. Maybe you need to manage anger, overcome negative self-talk, or recognize personality types better. Look, there's a reason self-help books take up all that real estate at Borders. Find one that resonates and get to work – on yourself.

The people who really do well in our business don't have the easy clients; they're the ones who find themselves in thorny situations with challenging personalities and turn lemons into... well, you know the rest of that cliché. But it's true.

Think of it this way. At a rodeo (don't you just love these similes?) they don't waste effort trying to stop the bull from being a bull. They just stay aboard as long as possible until they get their prize.

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".