

Four vital tasks drive account management plans for tough environments

In tough environments, it's important to develop and execute a plan to succeed with each major client you serve. Crafting and executing your plan will enable you to:

- Keep your client extremely satisfied
- Position yourself correctly
- Win the work you should be doing
- Successfully adjust to potential shakeups at your client

Your plan should address each of these vital tasks.

You can keep your client extremely satisfied when you:

- Do a great job on your existing work. Check that your client is extremely satisfied and fix anything that is not viewed as “perfect” about your work.
- Document and communicate the value you are delivering to your client on existing work. Many professionals thoroughly identify the concrete value they deliver. Maybe they think that providing value is just part of the job (and it is). But once you’ve done the hard work of doing a fabulous job for your client, make sure they know it. Tell them the dollar value of what you have done (e.g., we saved you "x" in cost, or we eliminated a risk that could have cost you "y"). Don't forget to also mention value you've delivered that is intangible or not quantifiable.
- Check with your client about past work. Find out if they were completely satisfied with what you did. If not, then fix it now. Better late than never.

You will position yourself correctly for the future when you:

- Identify where your client **is going**, and the opportunities that presents for you. Your client is probably changing plans rapidly as they cope with the shifting economic environment and try to manage their risks in uncertain times. Stay in close communication with them about how their plans (or their portfolio of plans) is changing. Adapt your work to their needs.
- Identify where your client **should be going**, the value that presents for them, and the opportunity it presents for you. In uncertain times you can add immense value. As a professional who knows them, you can diagnose their situation, identify opportunities they may have (there may be silver linings for them in their dark clouds if they move quickly in the right way), and help them to identify, minimize and/or hedge risks they face.

- Identify how your client **should come out of the current mess**. The economy will sort itself out at some point. Start the conversation now about how your client can position themselves for the better world to come, and help them make the required moves at the right time. Helping them think ahead is a way to become a distinctive professional and advisor in their eyes.

To win the work you should be doing, use your assessment to help your client identify what they should do, and where you should help them. Figure out what you need to do to make sure you are the professional who gets that “right work.”

You also need to successfully adjust to potential shakeups at your client. Shakeups are a risk at your client. Key relationships may be at risk (what will happen to your work if the person who is your key contact gets eliminated?). Now is time to make sure that your organization has adequate coverage of decision-makers and influencers, and a contingency plan to respond immediately to potential changes at the client.

Something to try this week

Draft a simple written plan that outlines how you’ll achieve each of these four vital tasks. If you serve a client with others from your firm, it’s essential that they take part too (it might take 60-90 minutes to have a good first meeting). Identify who will do what by when to make it happen. Then do it!!

What are these tips?

These monthly tips are intended to help professionals create more business and enjoy their work more. We focus on how to start relationships, how to build relationships, and how to convert those relationships into sales.

Can you answer my questions about business development?

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