

Account Management is a key part of the ongoing value a company brings to its clients. The account manager can be a key part of retaining a client's business. They have the ability to 'bring it all together' while providing value all along the way.

World Class Account Management

by Lani Cathey



World-class Account Management is not necessarily a profound art. It starts with the premise that you should work harder to keep your client than you worked to gain the client in the first place. Another way to view managing your ongoing relationship with a valued client is to recognize that the sale is NEVER COMPLETED! You should focus the same energy as you implement your services or offerings that you do to achieve an extraordinary sales goal. The difference is in being "client-focused" versus "sales-focused." A true partnership is a long-term commitment to excellence. Account Management is the process of continually providing value and always being aware of your client's changing business environment and needs.

Organization and Planning

Managing a successful client relationship requires effective organization and thoughtful planning. Since it is imperative to never waste a client's time, always be prepared. Always plan every encounter with a thought-out Call Plan to determine your objectives, the "gifts" you will provide, and the questions you will ask. Then make sure all promises are documented with agreed to follow-up dates.

Once a promise is made, exceed the expectation of what you provide. You may deliver more than you had promised or deliver it sooner. If the list for follow-up is extensive or critical, make sure that the client receives a written reply with "what," "when," and "who"—then keep the commitment. By being organized in your encounters and in your follow-up at every level in the client organization, you will convey to every person that their business is valued.





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Communication—Internal and External

To enhance your team's ability to consistently deliver the same message to the client, ensure the team is always updated on your activities. As Art Wilson has said, "One team, one message, one focus—the client." You cannot achieve this without keeping the team informed.

A useful tool for communicating your value and support to your client's organization is a regular activity summary delivered to the highest level at the client. Usually produced quarterly, this summary outlines all valuable activity you have performed over the time period. In addition to demonstrating your commitment to the client, a quarterly activity report provides an opportunity to re-open dialogue with the client to determine if their goals or business initiatives have changed. Open lines of communication are valuable in continually being able to focus on the client's critical needs.

It's the Small Stuff

Being on time for appointments, returning calls promptly, respecting people's valuable time, and saying "thank you" may all sound like little things. However, these "little" things can make the difference in achieving success versus experiencing failure. The Golden Rule applies to every customer encounter.

Respect their time as you respect your own. Do not make an appointment, a phone call, or send an e-mail that does not in some way provide value. Consistently exhibit these behaviors at every level of the organization, from secretary to CEO. It is important to remember that your effectiveness and reputation spans all titles.

World-class account management is a very distinct way to set your organization apart from the competition and keep competition away. It is much easier to keep a client than have to regain it once a relationship has deteriorated or you have lost touch. Loyalty works both ways.

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