



Client, Values and [Guiding Principles](#)

RELEVANT RESOURCES

ARTICLE:

[Client Service,
Not Client Servility](#)

ARTICLE:

[Create Trust, Gain a Client](#)

BLOG POST:

[Can You Differentiate
Yourself from a Competitor
in a Sales Presentation?](#)

Vision, values, customer focus, guiding principles, trust. Those words are among the leading candidates for top business buzzwords of the last few decades. They do for eyes what Krispy Kreme does for donuts—put glaze all over.

Yet they do have meaning. Consider these three propositions concerning complex, intangible services businesses¹ (CISBs):

1. Three core values are axiomatic: client focus, collaboration, long-term view
2. Vision matters less than values
3. Clients matter more than competition

Of these, the first is the most fundamental. If we can get past the glaze-over effect of that proposition, the first two can almost be deduced from it. Let's look at each of the 3 core values in turn, then at the issues of values vs. vision and clients vs. competition.



Charles H. Green, 2002

Client, Values and Guiding Principles

VALUE 1: CLIENT FOCUS

By “client-focus,” I mean a pervasive set of both mindsets and behaviors that drive a client-based perspective and a habit of noticing and paying attention. At its heart is the deep belief that “if I consistently do right by my client, I too will be rewarded.” Here are

just nine reasons why client focus is so critical to CISBs:

- Consistent focus on the client’s best interests increases **trust**;
- CISBs deal in complex problems—client-focus improves **problem definition**;
- CISBs don’t know all the answers--client focus allows constant **learning**;
- Clients won’t let you **earn the right** to offer solutions until they

feel you’ve understood their situation—and that comes about by truly paying attention;

- True client-focus is a **competitive edge**—few people really practice it;
- Client focus encourages the client to **share more**, open up, give more access;

- Client focus leads to **collaboration** by the client;
- Client focus fosters **acceptance** of recommendations;

Being client-focused begins with a state of mindfulness, of paying attention and being open to a client’s issues and situation—as well as to a client’s concerns, desires and fears. Things which detract from this state of mindfulness are therefore destructive of client focus. Consider this very short list of unconscious, “harmless” things which actually serve to destroy client focus:

DESTROYERS OF CLIENT FOCUS—A SMALL, PARTIAL LIST

- Seeking to control the agenda or outcome of a meeting or phone call
- Focus on one’s own “share of client wallet”
- Waiting too long to talk about money issues
- An inability to confront clients on difficult issues
- A belief that problems will get better if just left alone
- Focus on beating the competition

Being client-focused begins with a state of mindfulness, of paying attention and being open to a client’s issues and situation.



Charles H. Green, 2002

Client, Values and Guiding Principles

- Cross-selling for its own sake, not the sake of the client
- Pushing for a job when another firm is more qualified
- A focus on credentials, rather than client issues, in the selling process
- Seeing selling as unrelated to adding value

It is possible to retain strength of identity and objectivity and still work very collaboratively.

- Being motivated by fears of how a client will perceive us as individuals
- A preference for working “back at the office” rather than on client-site
- Any attachment whatsoever to “winning” an argument
- The belief that there are trade-

offs between clients’ interests and our own

Some of these views may seem unduly restrictive. For example, how can there not be trade-offs from time to time between our interests and those of our clients? The answer is, because there is no good rule for deciding when we should act in our own interest vs. that of our client. Anything short of “the client’s interest rules” will destroy the

client’s faith in whose interests we are serving, take away from client focus, and so on. The rule of client focus is truly a very demanding one, of necessity. Dialing back 10% on client focus reduces bene-fits disproportionately. Basically, client focus “when I feel like it” is a contradiction.

VALUE 2: COLLABORATION

If your interests are truly those of your client, then there are many reasons to collaborate. Benefits include sharing of perspectives, enhanced creativity, greater efficiency, more buy-in, greater honesty, fewer misunderstandings, greater trust, and division of labor, to name a few.

Why not collaborate? A loss of perspective must be guarded against, to be sure. You can’t afford to confuse collaboration with co-dependency. Yet, it is possible to retain strength of identity and objectivity and still work very collaboratively.

The truth is—the absence of collaboration is almost always due to a shallowness of belief in common goals, and/or an inability to confront. What things are hard to confront? Conflict;



Charles H. Green, 2002

Client, Values and Guiding Principles

billing rates; personalities; staffing; and our own egos. Like client focus, collaboration has to be lived “hard” to get it right. Here are five stretch indicators:

If you truly believe you will in the long term do well by serving your client, then you will be willing to make certain investments, perhaps even recommending someone better qualified for a particular job.

- YOU KNOW YOU’RE BEING TRULY COLLABORATIVE WHEN:**
1. you write the proposal with the client
 2. you run a sales meeting like an early phase project meeting
 3. you openly discuss staffing, fees, rates and personalities with the client
 4. you aren’t afraid to say “I don’t know” when you don’t—which is often
 5. both you and your client have strong points of view freely expressed.

VALUE 3: LONG TERM VIEW

In the long term, there is no such thing as a win for the client and a loss for the firm; or a loss for the client and a win for the firm. In the

long term, there are only two possibilities—win-win, and lose-lose. Seek one out, avoid the other.

The long term is the right perspective from which to view issues of investment and return. If you truly believe you will **in the long term** do well by serving your client, then you will be willing to make certain investments, perhaps even recommending someone better qualified for a particular job.

Don’t let this excuse low margins and “investment pricing.” The long-term view means that the provider firm must **also** prosper in the long run. A client doesn’t benefit from a few cut-rate golden eggs if it means killing the goose. You need the ability to have honest discussions with your client about the mutual levels of benefit accruing from a long-term view. In the long-term context, short-term problems often fade.

VALUES AND CLIENTS, NOT VISION AND COMPETITION

For business at large, “strategy” largely means “competitive strategy.” The vocabulary of business is revealing—taking share,



Charles H. Green, 2002

Client, Values and Guiding Principles

market penetration, competitive advantage, core competencies, segment strategies, scale advantage. All these terms are rooted in a perspective of “us” vs. “them,” where “them” is the competition. Companies win if their

visions are more compelling, and their organizations more aligned to deliver. The marketplace is the arbiter of a zero-sum contest between winners and losers.

This system works well when customers also benefit directly from competition. But that connection is far more distant in complex, intangible services businesses. There may be many ways to distinguish a Jaguar from a Saab; but they pale in significance next to the different ways a simple piece of litigation can be handled.

When the problem is unique, when the seller and deliverers are individuals, when the product is abstract to begin with, then there exist infinite opportunities for nuance. If we can differentiate salt, chickens and water, then

the opportunity to differentiate on the basis of human interactions is rich. This comes about by being client-centric.

Success in CISBs lies not in competitive differentiation, but in superior customization to the client at hand. Trust—built on client-focused, collaborative relationships with a long-term perspective—is the single most powerful reason for clients to join and stay. Do great and courageous work for your clients, and the market will take care of itself.

1. Consulting firms, commercial banks, accounting firms, HR/benefits firms, law firms, enterprise software consulting, insurance and brokerage firms, private banking, search and staffing firms, architects, advertising and PR agencies, and internal functions like HR and IT.

There may be many ways to distinguish a Jaguar from a Saab; but they pale in significance next to the different ways a simple piece of litigation can be handled.

TQ DIAGNOSTIC TEST

[TAKE THE TQ Diagnostic Test](#) and discover your Trust Temperament™.

Answer 20 simple questions based on the [Trust Equation](#), and you will discover a powerful tool for business success—your Trust Quotient and your Trust Temperament™. These revealing answers will tell what you do that helps people trust you, and the things you can do to improve the way you are perceived.

Your Trust Temperament report will tell you whose trust you are most likely to gain, what about you people are likely to trust, and specific actions you can take to be as trustworthy, and as trusted, as possible, so you can:

- Increase sales results
- Improve credibility in business
- Build deeper and more satisfying personal relationships with people who matter

Invest in yourself now! Take the Trust Quotient diagnostics now and get your 20+ page personal report now.

DEEP ANALYSIS, BIG REWARD, SMALL PRICE.

Take the TQ Diagnostic Test

SUBSCRIBE

If you enjoyed this article and want more from [TrustedAdvisor](#), please [click here to subscribe](#) to my mailing list, where you will receive monthly updates from us. And, of course, we'll never share your email with anyone else.

© This ebook is protected under the [Creative Commons](#) license. No commercial use, no derivative work. Feel free to share it, post it, or copy it.