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## THE IDEAL RELATIONSHIP

### The Client's View

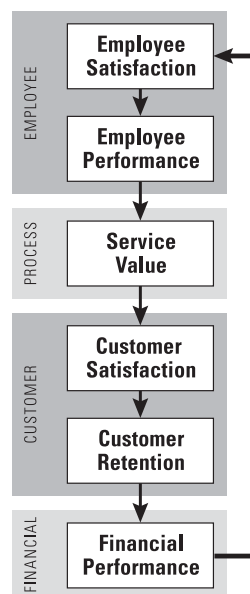
From the client's perspective, what is the "ideal interior designer"? Each client has unique goals, constraints, and expectations, so there may be as many definitions of "ideal" as there are clients themselves. Yet there are at least three core attributes that define a client's aspirations for an effective service relationship:

- **Understanding.** *Clients are human beings who want to be heard and understood. They want to work with service providers—designers—who listen to what they say—receptively, empathetically, actively. They want designers to take their ideas into account and they want responsive answers to their questions.*
- **Value.** *At its most basic level, the relationship between client and designer represents a business transaction in which service is rendered and payment is made. As the buyer, the client is practically obligated to seek a fiscally responsible solution—a fair price, a good deal, an outcome that serves the organization's business needs within budget.*
- **Success.** *Ultimately, clients want results: not just a designer with a good reputation, an impressive client list and a host of awards, but a designer whose solution and behavior reflects a true understanding of this client's needs and motivations. Ultimately, clients want to know that the outcome the designer delivers is exactly what they need to achieve their business objectives. They want the designer to help them succeed.*

In all these areas, clients desire complete fulfillment. They want more than a little value, a bit of understanding, or a hint of success; they want *total satisfaction*. And they will reward the designer for it. For example, three Harvard Business School professors researched why certain service organizations excel. In their book, *The Service Profit Chain*, they revealed that customers who rated Xerox a five (on a five-point scale) on customer satisfaction surveys were six times more likely to repurchase a Xerox product than those who gave the company only a four. Thus, "it was quickly concluded that fours were relatively meaningless," and Xerox management set the company's sights on achieving total satisfaction as a means of sustaining and gaining business.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, “satisfied” is a minimum standard, and it makes no guarantee of the designer’s continued success. Authors Benjamin Schneider and David E. Bowen, drawing on the Harvard research noted above, assert that “businesses must strive for 100 percent, or total, customer satisfaction and even *delight* to achieve the kind of loyalty they desire.”<sup>2</sup> Knowing the importance of total customer satisfaction, service providers may view their customers in a new light (see Figure 39-1). Some customers are so satisfied they become “apostles” for the provider—spreading the word about the product or service to other potential customers. An effective cadre of apostles can generate tremendous value for an organization at virtually no cost. Thus, service providers are wise to invest in converting “near-apostles” to “apostles.” The other end of the spectrum warrants attention as well. There we find the “terrorists,” whose dissatisfaction is so great that they also spread the word, professing their bad experience with the service provider to as many listeners as possible.<sup>3</sup>

**FIGURE 39-1**  
Service Profit Chain  
Diagram.



### The Designer’s View

To be confident that clients will come back again and again, an interior designer must ensure that clients are delighted with the services and solutions delivered. Such relationships are “ideal” for the designer because they contribute to the long-term viability of the designer’s business through increased client retention and profitability. Satisfying the client is the designer’s job, and achieving total satisfaction is largely within the designer’s control as service