

for a short period, he or she should leave detailed information with the person who answers the phone, on voice mail and, if possible, as an automatic response to e-mail. This way, clients will know not to anticipate an immediate response and/or whom to contact in the designer's absence.

- **Be prompt.** *The designer should deliver standardized communications according to schedule (such as the second day after weekly meetings or on the first of the month). If the client asks for information off-cycle, the designer must provide it promptly. A design firm may have standards for appropriate response times, such as returning phone calls and e-mail messages within one business day. Even if a designer does not have the answer, he or she should return the call to indicate that someone is working on it.*
- **Keep promises.** *If the designer promised a report or answer by Monday, the client must receive it by Monday. If the designer promised to get back to the client on a special issue, it must not be allowed to slip through the cracks.*
- **Don't just react, anticipate.** *Responding does not necessarily mean reacting to a client's request, question, or concern; in fact, some of the most responsive actions are those that anticipate the client's need.*

GET THE PICTURE

Much of the interior designer's work produces outcomes that are visual. The client pays the designer to create something that "looks right." Although the client defines "right," the interior design team must understand and translate that definition into a physical solution that lives up to the client's vision. To reach such an understanding, the designer must ask effective questions (as described above). Additionally, the designer and the client must share a "visual vocabulary" so that the design team understands the aesthetic perceptions the client puts behind such terms as "global," "first-class," "collegial," "warm," "modern," "high-tech," "nice but not too nice," and "colorful."

BE EFFICIENT

In years past, getting information to and from the client could add days and even weeks to the design process. The mere act of sending drawings for

review, even with express delivery service, could take a day or more for a client cross-country. But current technology and alternative business practices allow clients and designers to use information immediately. For instance, electronic media technology allows both designers and clients to transmit information without delay. Internet or web-based tools allow designers to post drawings electronically for immediate review by a client who can offer quick feedback by e-mail or conference call. Designers who avail themselves of such technologies can trim time off the overall project schedule, or at least conserve time for more value-added activities.

Technology is not the only way to achieve greater efficiency in communication. Innovative changes in work process also can accelerate work routines. An alternative to the traditional “go-away-and-work” model is the *charrette* process. Charrettes are workshops that involve the client’s decision makers and the designers working and collaborating directly to achieve immediate results.

Be a Business Consultant

Interior design for corporate and professional services clients is the strategic exercise of design principles to satisfy business objectives. As such, the people who work in corporate interior design must be not only creative but also business minded. Designers must understand the business problem as deeply as they understand the design problem. Thus, the members of an interior design team are business consultants in the eyes of their clients—and must live up to the rising expectations for this breed of service provider. This section continues to emphasize the drive for total client satisfaction, and describes several consulting tactics interior design professionals can use to advance their client relationships.

DEFINE GOALS AND CONSTRAINTS

Thinking like a business consultant means knowing what the client hopes to achieve, then developing a strategy for reaching that end. Thus, when meeting with a client regarding a new project, the designer’s first order of business is to learn where the client wants to go. What will make the project a success in the client’s eyes? This is the designer’s first opportunity to ask effective questions, as described above. In particular, some of the most critical questions, as a new project begins, are about goals and constraints.