- **Goals.** ***What does the client want? What is the organization's business mission? By what criteria does the client measure success? What does the client envision in terms of outcome? Who must the client satisfy? What message should this facility project? Learning about the client's goals will help the designer understand what the interior design solution needs to accomplish.***
- **Constraints.** ***What are the client's limits? What potential "inhibitors" might stand in the way of achieving or framing the client's goals? The designer's questions should drive at customary constraints such as budget, time frame, and design standards, as well as less-expected issues such as density targets (square feet per person), national purchasing contracts, and reuse of existing assets.***

Doubtless, the client's goals and constraints may present numerous contradictions. The designer must reconcile these contradictions and define a solution that achieves the appropriate balance between considerations.

PROVIDE THE EXPERT OPINION

As insightful and educated as clients may be, they are not responsible for understanding the many interior design possibilities for the spaces they manage. Their time and attention are occupied by a host of other issues. So they hire interior designers to provide them with excellent ideas, solutions and service.

Notice that last word, *service*. It is not "servitude." Accepting an interior design assignment does not place the designer in bondage to the client's beliefs. As business consultants, designers have a professional obligation to educate and guide the client. Any proposed solutions must reflect the designer's best assessment of how to reach the client's business goals. Although designers should take the client's preferences into account, they need not propose a mere regurgitation of those preferences. The clients deserve educated advice, not just "yes."

Of course, the client is not obligated to take the designer's advice. In fact, it is the client's prerogative to make a decision that the designer deems "wrong." If the client insists on a direction different than the one the designer prefers, the designer must respect and support that decision (unless, of course,

the direction violates local codes or the designer's code of ethics). The best the designer can do is educate the client on the benefits of investing in the proposed solution and make clear the consequences of the client's decision.

MAKE APPROPRIATE PROMISES

Because the designer is considered an "expert," the client will rely heavily on the designer's word. So the designer must be clear about what he or she can and cannot promise (recognizing once again that the complexity of the Project Circle leaves so many factors beyond the designer's immediate control). For example, a designer can promise a delivery date for drawings, but cannot guarantee a firm date for completion of construction. A designer can provide a statement of probable cost, but cannot define a precise budget without qualified bids from the marketplace.

AVOID AND RESOLVE CONFLICTS

Most conflicts in client relationships arise from "misses"—misunderstandings, miscommunications, miscalculations, missed deadlines. While these misses can occur on either side of the relationship, any problem can be construed as a negative reflection on the interior designer ("You should have warned us . . ."; "You should have anticipated this . . ."; "You should have known what I meant . . . "). Thus, the designer must take strategic and proactive steps to avoid conflict and resolve disputes should they arise. The designer must always remember to think of the relationship with the client as a business relationship, and to document it carefully.

For example, designers must ground their aesthetic recommendations on a business-based rationale. If clients are to believe in and support the designer's ideas, they need evidence that the recommendations are sound. Sufficient grounds for a client to spend thousands to millions of dollars to implement a design solution do not include gut instinct, intuition, or a sense of art. Therefore, when presenting ideas, the designer must provide more substantiation than a mere "trust me." For example, in making lighting recommendations, the designer can educate the client that 30 percent of electric costs are spent on lighting and show how a proposed lighting solution may actually save at the bottom line. This way, even if conflicts do arise, they likely can be discussed in terms of logic, reason, and business realities. When designers rely on such a business-based rationale, they can avoid arguments on subjective matters of taste, which are decidedly more difficult to reconcile.