

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 . . .

Another useful strategy is to make documentation a discipline. By keeping a record of decisions and communication between interior design team and client, the designer creates an information source of value to both parties and the entire design team. Particularly when a discrepancy arises, the designer will have ready access to the facts needed to resolve the issue quickly and with minimal disruption to the project. In addition to the expected documentation such as contracts, proposals, drawings, correspondence, schedules, and cost estimates, designers' files should grow as they add e-mail messages and notes from meetings and phone conversations. If possible, designers should take advantage of electronic storage, whether on individual workstations, shared networks, or project websites, to make it easy for team members to locate, retrieve and share documentation.

TRANSFORM CLIENTS INTO APOSTLES

The interior designer is in business not just to satisfy clients' objectives, but also to accomplish his or her own business vision. Fortunately, one follows the other. In the best of relationships, designer and client become "patrons" for one another. A patron is a person chosen, named, or honored as a special guardian, protector, or supporter. As the designer guards, protects, and supports the client's business initiatives through design, the client will support and advance the designer and his or her reputation.

As we have seen, when clients are totally satisfied, they are far more likely to rehire the designer. The result is not a mere project relationship, but an enduring account-based relationship, in which the client becomes "apostle" and returns again and again for the designer's trusted expertise and support.

But there is more. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, apostles are not just loyal, but so satisfied they will recommend a service to others.⁴ Thus, as satisfied customers become apostles, the designer gains not just long-lasting accounts, but new relationships as well.

RECOGNIZE HUMAN NEEDS

For all its bottom-line concerns, business is still a human endeavor. Designers may speak in terms of "clients," "organizations," and "enterprise," but they deal on a day-to-day basis with human individuals. And success, or total client satisfaction, depends on the general contentment (or even delight) of these human beings. Therefore, the interior designer as business consultant