

# **Advertising Agency Client Service: My Message for Success**

## **By Bruce McTague**

Welcome to account management. You are a unique person at the agency. You have to know as much about your clients business as an employee of that company does (maybe a little more). You also have to know more about your own agency than the client does (a lot more in fact). You are paid by the agency, but you won't ever get paid unless your client is successful. You are a business consultant – internally and externally. You are an expert in 'objection management' (or at least you better become one if you want to be able to get ideas implemented) and you are a decision maker.

Think of yourself as the one who drops the pebble into the still pond. Your job isn't just to drop the pebble but more so to recognize how the ripples will spread out and affect everything surrounding you. As a junior account person your pond may be small (simply opening a project affects a number of people), but the key to becoming a senior manager is recognizing how decisions dropped into the business pond ultimately impact when the ripples hit the long-term horizon. You won't get them all right. And you'll have to be flexible enough to know when to course correct versus "stay the course".

It's a tricky job. But it's a great job. It is never dull. High risk. High reward. Being the closest to the client you get to truly share in their successes more than anyone else in that agency. As the main contact with the client you get to share all the agency successes. The highs are high. The lows are low. But (this being written by an account person with over 20 years experience) it is the best job in the agency.

Some rules of the road for account management within my group:

### **Create a Positive Environment**

People in the agency take your lead. If you are passionate, they will be passionate. If you show you respect the client, they will respect them also. It is up to you to create an environment that makes people want to work on an account. Sure. On occasion you will be asked to work on an account that you will scratch your head and trying to figure out what YOU like about the account.

Well. That is actually part of being a great account person. Finding that initial spark yourself. Finding the passion for that account that you can share with others. Trust us .. there are people on the client side who LOVE what they do. Find out what it is. Tap into it yourself. Be accountable. Be honest. Be an expert. And share the passion they have.

You have to be a little of a 'chameleon.' No. that does not mean changing your ideals or beliefs. It simply means you have to assume some of the characteristics of your account environment so that you can blend in and become part of the client. Then you will be successful. Then you can create a positive environment. Then you can convince your client to take some chances and that typically leads to bigger results and successes. (then everyone is positive when that happens.)

### **Lead versus follow.**

Lead, lead, lead. That's your job. You always have to know where 'you are going' so that you can help people better understand why they have to do what they are doing. **Always** have long-term attitude embedded in everything you do. Following (particularly your client) often means you have entered the 'short term trap.' This is a doom loop that you can only break out of by being a leader.

And you can only be a leader if you are informed and educated. You have to know more than the other person. Internally as you guide people through the process you have to be able to share the knowledge that lets them do their job better. In order to lead the client you **have to know their business and/or products**. You cannot talk with a car client unless you have driven the car, been on the lot with the salesman and even maybe visit the manufacturing plant.

In the absence of anything better, even a camel will walk to the closest water .. even if it is poisoned. Even the smartest clients need to be led. Without leadership given the myriad of projects clients can demand, it is easy to very quickly go astray and simply start "following" and just start 'doing what we have been told to do' – and that is how relationships get poisoned. Clients rarely leave agencies where their account management team is respected as leaders.

### **Proactive versus reactive.**

The corollary to lead versus follow. Being proactive.

The moment you start to react to a client's suggestion or a situation you know you are behind. This doesn't mean you shouldn't listen. You should ALWAYS listen. In fact, listening can help you become more proactive. By building on what you heard (and learned) from your client you would continuously share forward thinking, new ideas and stay ahead of the game.

Half the battle in account management is figuring out how to keep moving forward. By reacting you are defending and not moving at all (in fact you often find yourself moving backwards!).

At any level in account management you should be thinking proactively. You are not an order taker. The minute you do become one...find another job.

### **Outcome versus output.**

As account managers we are all about 'doing things' -- creating advertising, generating ideas, solving businesses problems -- that generate outcome for our clients. Outcome. Real business results. Yes. Business results. An agency is measurable by results. Even if we do not control all aspects of the plan. Trust me. If business results are down, a client doesn't want to hear why an agency is not responsible for those results ... they want an agency that is also losing sleep and coming up with solutions.

To be sure we do that (generate successful results) we need to insure quality output. Don't settle for "c" product or "ok ideas." They'll come back to haunt you with "ok outcome." And ok outcome doesn't make clients happy.

The reality is...as you start your career in account management...your role and responsibilities are focused on generating the output. Project management and just getting all those projects done. Efficiently generating the work and making sure it is as effective as possible.

But as your responsibilities grow you will become increasingly focused on outcome. Short-term and long-term. Sometimes in the beginning stages of your account management career it is difficult to see what the ultimate long-term outcome strategy is. That's ok. It will become clearer as you grow and take more of the long-term leader role on the accounts you work on.

But always remember. All agency output should be judged on outcome. Even in your self-assessment. If you are not generating good outcome, then start judging your output. Maybe it needs to be improved. And, ultimately, that is what great account managers do. Constantly assess, evaluate and improve.

**About Bruce McTague:**

*In a career spanning over 20 years, I've been involved with a wide range of industries including packaged goods, restaurant, pharmaceutical, retail, business-to-business and tourism. I won't bore you with all the details, but the bottom line is I have touched so many businesses across so many categories the headline for my career should probably be "Collector of experiences and knowledge."*

***If you would like some additional work experience details and see what a number of people have said about me, visit my [LinkedIn Profile](#) my blog, [Enlightened Conflict](#) or contact me directly by [email](mailto:bruce@brucemctague.com) at [bruce@brucemctague.com](mailto:bruce@brucemctague.com).***