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Business Insights

BRING SOMETHING TO THE TABLE

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Key to long term success for a professional services firm is finding ways to bring something to the table. Differentiation is a well-worn strategy for competing in the marketplace, but it is also core to providing new and important value to your clients.

For firms like ours, the base skills and project tasks are similar from project to project, client to client, and across the available talent pool. Delivery of those skills against quality project outcomes represents table stakes for joining the game. That isn't enough to wow a client. Bring something to the table.

- **In your engagement model.** How easy is it to do business with your firm? Do you have a well-defined and consistent approach that takes you from proposal to a running engagement? Your proposal and contract should be clear, readable, and fair. Your terms should be flexible and adapt easily to the ways that your clients

prefer to pay. The order and purpose of the steps for a project should be well documented. Make it as easy as possible for your clients to do business with you.

- **In your flexibility and responsiveness.** No battle plan survives first contact. A favorite book of mine is [Getting Naked: A Business Fable About Shedding the Three Fears That Sabotage Client Loyalty](#) by Patrick Lencioni. Patrick talks about ways to remain flexible and adaptive when things change in an engagement, battling "The Fear of Being Embarrassed". It is the way you respond to challenges and change that will be remembered long after the engagement completes.
- **In your routine communications.** When status reports are filled with technical jargon or reference complicated diagrams, they won't be read. You should make these and other regular/routine messages clear, concise, and informative. You may even consider making them at least a little fun to read.

- **In your level of transparency.** If you act as if you have something to hide, then you do. “Getting Naked” talks about “The Fear of Losing Business”. When you are driven by such a fear you will soften hard messages or even hide them. You will scramble to fix a problem so that your client is never aware that it happened. This behavior is not sustainable and fights against building trust.

Don't just do the job you were hired to do. If you want to differentiate, find ways that consistently and frequency wow your client. Get the job done, of course, but make it the kind of experience that builds trust and customer loyalty. Bring that to the table.

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