

Leadership is a dance...

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...and it takes two to tango, says Lana Marais, Regional Client Service Director at DAN Sub-Saharan Africa.



Lana Marais

Excellent leadership demands excellent communication skills, particularly when it comes to building the client and stakeholder relationships that are vital to business success. These relationships are no different to any other relationship I have ever been in; they thrive on good old TLC, packed with loads of support and trust. You gotta give some to get some. I'm by no means an expert but believe me when I say that working across multiple African markets and cultures, I do my fair share of relationship building. So here are my two cents' worth...

People like people who get things done

And this is multi-directional, from both the client and agency perspective. Having to be a nag bag is no fun for anyone and can put a strain on both parties. It topples the levels of trust and the ability to deliver. People bond with people they can count on and trust, and this builds solid relationships.

Know each other's B side

We all have lives outside our day jobs and no matter how passionate we are about our careers, we all strive for balance. So, get to know your key players and their interests. Be genuine about this; it will go a long way towards building a relationship and a bond that you can use to level the playing field and connect. Nothing breaks the ice like a mutual interest – we all (well, many of us) have families and relationships, we ride bikes, we drink wine, we work out (well some of you), we paint, we collect stuff... get to know your client/account director/team leader's B side and use it to make them your friend.

Manage the scope

One thing that will certainly ruin a good relationship is poor, late or underdelivery. In my experience, this is usually due to a capacity issue (no rocket science there), but if you delve a bit deeper, you will also find the problem actually starts with the scope of work. Scope can derail our best efforts if not managed properly.

Growth is the biggest culprit that impacts the scope of work and can sneak up on you. The knock-on effect is that the resource plan then needs to be re-evaluated and re-negotiated. The goal here is to keep everyone happy and meet

deliverables.

Be a YES person, with a sexy BUT

We all know the easiest way to keep a client happy is to give them what they ask for, even if it's not in scope. But, have you ever tried using this to your advantage? Like this:

*"**Yes** dear client, you can have the media landscape I have spent the last three months perfecting, **but** you remember that OOH specialist agency, Posterscope, I was telling you about the other day? Can I bring them over to show you and the rest of your marketing team their awesome new tools?"*

Give and take is the name of the game, ladies and gentlemen.

Newbies vs the gently worn

Oh, don't we just all love an exciting new piece of business! But oldies can also be newbies, so don't lose focus on your current clients or customers while investing in the new kid(s) on the block. In fact, keep them front and centre; there is opportunity for growth with existing clients and this can often exceed new business income. New business comes to those who have moved beyond business to relationships. So, make your friends, keep them close and grow with them.

Of course, this is all easier said than done, but being an exceptional client- or customer-centric business will fuel client growth, which in turn will mean more spend. Everyone can do with more friends who spend, so start making them.

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