

## what great clients do

Some business leaders manage to become talent magnets. Not only are they followed by loyal employees and pursued by prospective ones, but they also attract the best agencies, consulting firms, and freelancers.

[Steve Jobs](#) sometimes berated the creatives at [Chiat/Day](#) and yet most of them considered it the highest honor to do work for him. When [Jim Stengel](#) served as [Procter & Gamble](#)'s CMO, he lured [Wieden+Kennedy](#), one of the hottest agencies at the time, to join the stodgy company's roster. When former [Motorola](#) and [Nike](#) CMO [Geoffrey Frost](#) passed away, dozens of heartfelt tributes were written by those for whom he was a client.

These and other leaders know how to motivate their agencies and consultants. They know that the way to get great work is to be a great client. **Great clients embrace these five attitudes and characteristics that make them the kind of people everyone wants to work with.**



**1. Great clients look for *partners*.** Companies need outside resources who engage in their clients' businesses as partners. They need people who will own the problem and commit to finding the best solution. Great clients are not satisfied with mere order takers who will do whatever they're asked to do. While they might find these kinds of resources handy for quick and dirty tactical projects, they know they can be only as good as the instructions they're given.

They also don't want simply service providers. Although some clients may see value in these people due to their expertise or excellent customer service, great clients know they're missing out on far more value because service providers are not likely to be thinking about the bigger picture beyond their specific scope of work.

Agencies, consultants, and even independent contractors who engage as partners help determine **what is the real problem that needs to be solved** – something that great clients find priceless. Great clients seek out this kind of partnership and pay for it.

**2. Great clients make their intentions known.** Although transparency comes with risk, great clients willingly take the odds. They know that keeping external resources on a need-to-know basis — whether it's regarding budget, decision-making authority, or expected outcomes — limits their effectiveness. While some business leaders withhold knowledge as a power move, **great clients don't play games.**

There are instances when clients don't communicate clearly about expectations or process because they don't know the answer themselves. Great clients won't tolerate ambiguity in these situations — they'll track down the information their agencies and consultants need.

**3. Great clients admit what they don't know.** As a corollary to #2, great clients aren't afraid to admit the limitations of their knowledge. They don't see it as a sign of weakness; and they know the danger of making something up or avoiding the subject and hoping their partner forgets about it.

Great clients are straightforward when they don't know the answer. **They practice open, honest communication and set the stage for others to do the same.**

**4. Great clients are an agency's best salespeople.** Great clients are thrilled when their outside resources succeed and they actively look for opportunities to toot their horns. Great clients are an agency's biggest supporters inside their organizations, even when budgets are scrutinized or when a bold recommendation is questioned. And they're evangelists for their partners externally, making referrals, providing references, and even helping them make presentations at industry conferences.

As less mature executives, they might have felt threatened by outsiders, afraid that a smart consultant or a creative agency would make them look less so in comparison. But **great clients have discovered that they look good when their partners look good.** And they've also learned that public promotion not only motivates their current resources but also attracts new ones.

**5. Great clients make their partners want to be better.** In the movie [As Good As It Gets](#), there is a poignant moment when the crotchety character played by [Jack Nicholson](#) tells [Helen Hunt](#)'s long suffering Carol, "*You make me want to be a better man.*" The compliment was considered such a high one, because it conveyed the inspiration one person can provide to another.

Great clients do this for their partners. **They make them want to be better – and they help them do so**, by challenging them when necessary and by giving them honest feedback. They give them growth assignments, just as they would a promising employee. They invest the time and energy in developing insights about their partners' strengths and opportunities and providing direction that helps them grow.

The best clients aren't necessarily the ones with the biggest budgets or the best brands. What separates great clients from everyone else is something far more elusive. It's the understanding that they are one half of a partnership which both players are responsible for. And with this perspective, **great clients build great brands.**