

Title:

The Key Ingredient in Client Satisfaction: Underpromise and Overdeliver

Word Count:

554

Summary:

If you operate a small service business, your word is your bond with your clients. A client might tolerate a broken promise here and there for a very good reason, but if the broken promises continue, the client's trust in you will be lost, and in very short order you will lose the client. Try the underpromise and overdeliver strategy -- it's a win-win situation for both you and your clients.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

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Like anyone else who operates a small service business, your word is your bond with your clients. A client might tolerate a broken promise here and there for a very good reason, but if the broken promises continue, the client's trust in you will be lost, and in very short order you will lose the client. Granted, things happen to you as a small business owner that are out of your locus of control--a family member becomes ill, you lose electrical power (I know about this one only too well!), or your computer crashes. So, on occasion, there will be times when you won't be able to honor your word and you'll have no control over that.

For all the other times, I employ a practice I learned about from the late Thomas Leonard, founder of Coach University and Coachville. It's the principle of underpromise and overdeliver. As a small service business owner, it can be challenging to juggle the needs and requests of 10, 20, 30 or more clients simultaneously. My experience has been that typically when the needs of one client slow down, the needs of another increase, and somehow it all manages to balance itself out in the end. On a rare occasion, though, it hits all at once, and that's when the beauty of this principle is demonstrated.

When in conversation with a client, instead of projecting the quickest time I might complete a consulting project, I give them a conservative estimate, taking into account the worst-case scenario. Many clients will push you for an earlier

completion date; after all, they're excited about the project and want to see results. Don't let them detract you from your underpromise and overdeliver strategy. Almost always I deliver on what I have promised earlier than the time projection I made to the client. When that happens, I emerge smelling like a rose....my client thinks I have accomplished a great feat and have completed her consulting job early! When I'm not able to finish something earlier than projected and instead complete it by the date I initially gave my client, the client still loves me. Why? Because I've continued to honor my word and done what I said I would do in the time I said I would do it.

This is an incredibly powerful principle to use because it's tough for either you or your client to lose under these conditions. What you're creating for yourself is some wiggle room just in case things don't go according to plan for one reason or another. In most of my conversations with clients, I'm fairly certain that I'll finish before I say I will, but I don't want to paint myself in a corner---just in case.. If something happens, like the "worst-case-scenario", I'm still able to deliver at the time actually promised to the client because I've built in some extra time for myself.

In the process, if you're really good and always deliver ahead of schedule, your clients might wise up to your strategy and ask if you can finish something sooner because "you always do". Don't let them box you in--still give a conservative estimate and continue your practice of "underpromising and overdelivering". You'll find it the quickest way of become a hero in the eyes of your clients.