

## Client/Agency Partnerships

Your partnership with your marketing firm is a lot like a rewarding, mutually-satisfying friendship. You have chosen your partner with the unstated understanding that they may do some things you can't; they may know some things you don't. A true partnership that transcends superficiality should not only be supportive in an overall sense, it should complement (vs. *compliment*) the goals of each.

Marketing firms and ad agencies are always seeking the perfect balance, weighing carefully what pleases or affirms the client and suggesting what is, in reality, best for them. You may be surprised to know how many otherwise-savvy businesspeople or marketing managers prefer to surround themselves with "yes" people whose existence is merely an affirmation of their own ideas. I will tell you from first-hand experience that it is most difficult to see or hear of a business suffering financially or otherwise from this kind of overindulgence by its marketing firm. Just as a sensitive friend might accuse of you of not being supportive if you disagree with them on certain issues, your marketing partners will be ineffectual if they aren't allowed a full voice in the relationship. As I've written before, it's a matter of trust. "Tough love" doesn't always feel good, even if it's ultimately best for your business.

For best results, don't micromanage your marketing team. You have (hopefully) hired them based on an initial comprehensive interview where they have asked you intelligent questions essential to making sound decisions on your behalf; the quality and tone of their portfolio and other creative products; stellar client and vendor references; and other specific criteria that is important to you -- anything from their scheduling procedures to their turn-around time to their billing terms. Once you have determined that they are the people you want and need, let go and let them do their job. It's what you are paying them for. As I've written time and again, micromanaging and second-guessing your agency will most assuredly result in a diminished product, a product whose look your agency will appear to be wholly responsible for. And that hurts them as much as it hurts you.

Does that mean that ad people aren't fallible or don't want or respect your input? Certainly not! But keep in mind that what they do, they do every single business day. They're good at it. They have built their business on making businesses like yours successful. And their reputation is reflective of your success.

Business partnerships, like friendships, are deep, enduring relationships. Successful partnerships depend mightily on give and take, an amalgam of ideas and perceptions, dreams and goals. Media guru Linda Ellerbee once confessed that her biggest business mistake was micromanaging others, not giving voice to the people who were so dedicated to her success. When she was forced to be away from the business for an extended period of time for cancer treatment, her business thrived *without her* like never before. Never again, she declared, would she second guess the people who were, in actuality, her most loyal supporters.

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