

Don't be fooled by its simplicity. It's as magical as it gets.
It will pay you prodigious dividends.

The most important question you can ask in
a business relationship is:

How are we doing?

Ask your clients. "How are we doing?" On a scale of 1 to 10, how are we doing? Are we meeting/exceeding your expectations?

Don't accept "yes", or "fine" or "okay". Don't be rigorously strict about it, simply persist and ask for a number. Once they've given you a number, ask what needs to be done in order to move the relationship from the number they gave you to a 10.

Now listen to them closely. Don't debate or defend, just listen. Once they've given you some suggestions, and then ask "What else?" They are now telling you what you need to do in order to meet their needs and move the relationship to a 10. You may decide that you don't want to make the effort required to move things to a 10. But, at the very least, you'll know what they think it will take to get there.

The next step is to tell them exactly what you're going to do to get there. And proceed to do it. You want to be able to get back to them within a reasonable period of time and let them know that you 1) care enough about their needs to have asked about them and 2) have made sure there are no obstacles hindering their satisfaction with your service.

"How are we doing?" is the efficacious question that opens doors, solidifies relationships, uncovers hidden assets and opens the referral portal. It is *the* question provided you take action once they tell you what needs to be done. Imagine how your clients might feel when hearing that you sincerely want to exceed their expectations and that you are taking action to do so. Once you've begun to make headway towards reaching that 10, you open the door for questions like: Mary, now that we've solved that issue who else do you know that would appreciate the same level of service?

After all, clients are going to be impressed with service that is closer to a 10 than a 4, right? They'll also be impressed with your effort and dedication to sustaining level 10 service. Isn't that what it's all about? Can you think of many clients who would give you additional assets or referrals with service below a 7?

Let's be honest: your ego may have to suffer a bit in this process. Your relationship with certain clients may not be anywhere near what you think it is. Their concerns/needs may not be anything like what you imagined. I suspect you'll have a healthy fear of hearing some of the issues your clients will bring up. Who wants to hear that, on a scale of 1 to 10, your relationship is only at a 4 (or worse)? But, at least now you'll have the opportunity to repair/improve it.

The only question that remains is: What do you need to do to get comfortable asking this question? Getting into the habit of asking, "How are we doing?" is a task in and of itself. What will it take for you to make it part of your routine?

P.S.: Isn't this a great question to ask your significant other, children, or business partners?

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