



# Relationship counselling

*Polish translator and interpreter Ewa Jasinska-Davidson offers some advice on how to build strong links with clients and develop mutual trust*



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Are you building strong relationships with your clients? Are you their number one person to go to when they have a problem? What do you do to ensure business relationships last? In April, I was invited by my former professor Danielle D'Hayer to deliver a workshop at London Metropolitan University on how to build strong client relationships. We all know that it is not easy to gain direct clients, so when we do manage to secure one, we should work hard on establishing a good rapport with them and ensuring they are happy with our services.

I have come up with a list of ten tips (based on my own experience) which I consider to have contributed to my company's success. The fact that I have been working with some of my clients for more than ten years now proves that I must be doing something right.

## 1) Listen to your clients

People love talking, and we should give them the opportunity to do so. Only then will we be able to discover some of the problems our customers face in business. Who knows – we might even be able to solve some of them. A client will always remember that you have taken the burden from their shoulders. For example, a client approached me asking if I knew anyone who could produce a promotional film for a national event they were planning. I went

through my database of contacts and found a reliable videographer, who did an excellent job for my client. After the film had been produced, the customer wanted to have the subtitles translated into seven different languages. I was happy to provide them with this service, in collaboration with my colleagues.

## 2) Adopt a 'can do' attitude

Clients perceive us as multicultural and multilingual experts, and may contact us with a wide range of

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queries regarding their overseas activities, even if they do not directly relate to interpreting and translation services. If this happens, try to be helpful even if the query does not relate to an area that you normally work in. Show your interest and offer your assistance. That may involve getting in touch with one of your contacts who does provide the type of expertise the client is looking for. Both parties will be very grateful that you put them in touch and added that extra value.

## 3) Be willing to learn something new

Many years ago, I was asked to undertake an interpreting assignment for the Polish National Veterinary Chamber. The job involved interpreting during visits to farms, abattoirs and universities in the UK. I agreed to complete the assignment but asked the client to provide me with some information about the veterinary industry in the UK and organise a few visits for me so that I could gain a better understanding of the sector. I did these preparations in my own time, and the company appreciated the fact I had gone the extra mile – I learned a lot and ended up specialising in the area of veterinary medicine. Since then, I have always been their number one person to go to when they need any linguistic assistance. The investment in learning something new has definitely paid off.

## 4) Tell your clients about new qualifications

Linguists never stop learning (we are always gaining new qualifications, adding new languages and developing new specialisations). We need to remember to keep our clients updated about our new qualifications. If we don't tell them, who will? It may actually be a good reason to pick up the phone and have a quick chat with them. While studying for my conference interpreting degree at London Metropolitan University, I would sometimes tell my clients about a funny anecdote or an interesting topic that had been raised during one of our mock conferences. It is always good to have small talk. As a result of one of these conversations, one of my clients asked for my opinion regarding engaging professional interpreters for a conference, as opposed to people who spoke two languages. You can imagine what my answer was. Because the client trusted me, they decided to go with professionals and asked me to find interpreters for that event.

## 5) Show clients you care

It is essential to maintain contact with clients. We can either give them a quick call or send a message via LinkedIn. Social media, blogs and



webinars are very powerful ways to remain in touch with our business network. At my workshop in London, I pointed out that simple gestures can sometimes produce miracles – for example, sending a short email to wish the client a happy birthday, asking them how their holiday was or sending them a Christmas card. I was asked by one of the workshop participants how far we can go and what the business boundaries are. I work mainly with Polish, English and Spanish clients, and there are some cultural differences (and the circumstances of interpreting assignments can vary). Therefore, I would always recommend using common sense to judge what approach to take with each client. A gesture that is considered thoughtful in one culture may be perceived as too intrusive or personal in another. Even if you are not getting any work from your client at the moment, it is important to make them aware that you are still out there providing services.

### 6) Follow up

A few weeks ago, I interpreted for a Polish client who was hosting a Spanish group. After I came back to the UK, I actually looked for some trade shows in that particular industry in Spain and sent him some recommendations. As a result of this, I have been provisionally booked to go with him to Madrid next year. The follow-up after a job is key – you should not only thank them for doing business with you and ask them for a testimonial, but also show your interest in working with them again. That way, you will be more likely to secure another assignment.

### 7) Be reliable, hard-working and professional at all times

I am sure we are all professional with our clients, but we should also be loyal to our profession and colleagues. For example, we should never undermine our profession by cutting rates. It also makes a great impression when the translation is delivered before the deadline, or when you make suggestions on how to improve the source text. I have some business clients who actually speak both Polish and English but prefer to use a professional translator.



It is an amazing feeling when you hand in your work and your client congratulates you on an outstanding translation.

### 8) Build trust

At my workshop, I used a case study. You're getting married tomorrow, but your client needs you today.

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What do you do? I have experienced this situation. I was getting ready for the big day when my client called me with a problem. I considered two options: making those few phone calls for my client, or delegating the work to one of my colleagues/associates. Since I knew the industry pretty well, I decided to make the phone calls and sorted the problem for him. I still managed to finish my wedding preparations and greet my guests, who had just arrived in Poland, and I also secured a job the following year through this client, who recommended me to one of their suppliers. When I came back from my honeymoon I had an email waiting in my inbox inviting me to collaborate with them in future.

### 9) Be honest

Don't ever pretend you can deliver something you can't. While I do interpreting from Spanish into Polish at conferences, I don't translate from Polish into Spanish. Instead, I will

always refer my clients to professional colleagues who can do it better and more quickly than me. You would be surprised how much more your clients will respect you if you are transparent with them.

### 10) Be passionate about running your own business

I love interpreting, languages and travelling. I enjoy waking up to new challenges every day, especially since no two days are ever the same. I like to share my passion with others: my associates and clients. I think it is very important to explain to people why you do what you do. According to Simon Sinek, 'People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.' I would definitely recommend watching one of Sinek's TED Talks to find out more about this theory.

On that note, I would like to add that the above tips are based on my own experiences, and there is no single recipe for building strong client relations. Successful relationships require a mixture of different skills and actions, and each individual needs to discover what works best for them. Building strong client relations is a long-term process, but it will help you to provide more services to existing clients, rather than spending most of your time looking for new ones. And the new clients will come from referrals from your existing ones.

I do sincerely hope you have found my tips useful and that you will be able to apply some of my suggestions to strengthen relationships with your clients. Finally, I would like to thank Danielle D'Hayer for giving me the opportunity to run a workshop and share my experiences with the wonderful audience at London Metropolitan University.



**Ewa delivered a workshop on building client relationships at London Metropolitan University in April**