

Ten ways VAs can make their clients LOVE them:

1. Care about your client's company as if it were your own. This isn't always easy because you're not an employee who is vested in the retirement plan. In fact, you're an independent contractor who can be fired at a moment's notice. However caring for your client's company in subtle, but important ways builds trust, which is vital to the long term VA-Client relationship.

For example, let's say that you completed some work for a client, but she dropped the ball and will look bad if you don't reach her so she'll finish the last step. Even though it is late in the evening, contact your client by any means possible.

2. Take Initiative. It's easy to fall into the trap of being the "assistant" and just sitting back and waiting to be told what to do, especially when you have other clients to help out, or your own work to do. But reminding your client that you are there to help, prompting them for tasks that are coming due, and reminding them when you don't hear back from them are all ways that you show your client that you "have their back."

3. Bring Ideas to the Table. Clients often have set ways of doing things, but you, as a VA with many clients, can bring alternate ideas for your client to consider (without breaching client confidentiality). Stay on top of technological advances, try free trials of innovative new systems, and suggest them to your client as ways to improve the bottom line or stay ahead of the competition.

4. Be Flexible. When I first started out as a VA, I had rigid standards such as inflexible business hours. Although I still prefer to take Friday's off, in today's economy and the realities of the 24/7 internet, working the occasional late night or doing a weekend check-in becomes necessary. Clients really appreciate this flexibility. For me, the key is mutual respect with a client. If you're working with an ideal client, then being taken advantage of won't be an issue.

5. Own Mistakes. Mistakes do happen, and we hate it when they do, but they are inevitable as hard as we try. Recently, a client and I were scrambling to finish an ebook with a completion deadline, and meanwhile, I was heading out of town for a mini-vacation. I finished the last edits and sent the file to my client and I was happy and carefree, that is, until I realized that I had sent the wrong file and couldn't make it right from my remote location. Ugh. My fault. I owned it, apologized, and made it right by knocking some time off my bill. It was the right thing to do. Fortunately, I have a wonderful client who recognizes that errors happen, understood, and appreciated the break on the invoice.

6. Don't take criticism personally. This one may be trite, but it is important. A lot of us VAs, let's face it, are perfectionist people pleasers. When we do something wrong, we dwell, and not in a good way, and we don't even need the client to get mad because we feel bad enough as it is. Get over it! Grow up and stop taking feedback in a personal way. Look at it this way... if a client is taking the time to tell you what they don't like and what they prefer, then they are taking the time to groom you into a better VA for them. That's a good thing. When they go silent and stop giving you ways to improve, they might be shopping for a new VA.

7. Make clients feel like they are your only client. Your clients know that you have other clients, but don't remind them of it constantly by ignoring their emails and phone calls and requiring long lead times for projects. Instead, don't overbook yourself and be responsive. Even if you are overloaded when a client email comes in, sometimes just letting them know that you received their request and that you're on it will be a relief to them.

8. Invoice Fairly. If you clock your time hourly, you know that sometimes tasks take way longer than they should for unforeseen reasons. The internet slows down, you have unexpected error messages occur, a program isn't working, or maybe you just had a real bad night's sleep and you're a little foggy. Although none of these are your fault, your client doesn't want to pay for them either. If you continually ask yourself, if I were a small business owner (which you probably are!), how much would you be willing to pay for this activity and bill accordingly.

9. Be a Problem Solver. Ultimately, you are there for your client to solve problems. When an obstacle emerges, don't just contact your client with the stated problem and ask what to do. Instead, inform your client that XYZ happened and you see three possible workarounds. Select a recommendation and say why, and then ask your client which she prefers. Make life for your client as easy as possible.

10. Bring Humor. Some client-VA relationships are strictly business, but that's not the kind of relationship that I prefer. I share certain parts of my personal life (where I'm going on vacation, that I'm married with a dog, and that the furnace is on the fritz), but I don't share my personal problems. Instead, I infuse humor, lightness, and a positive outlook whenever I can. Plus, I compliment what I see that my client is doing well in her business.