

# Setting the standard

## How to build a client experience orientation

To orient a company with the client experience means putting clients at the center of everything.

“That goes beyond your sales team,” says Michael J. Toth, Executive Vice President and Chief Experience Officer at Westfield Bank. “All employees need to embrace the focus on the clients, from front-line to backroom to boardroom.”

A client experience orientation embeds the client focus in the culture of the organization, placing it at the forefront during the entire client relationship lifecycle.

“It’s about enhancing processes and products to make them client-friendly and employees having a true end-to-end process orientation of serving clients,” he says.

*Smart Business* spoke with Toth about building a client experience orientation.

### Why is it important to focus on the client experience?

A focus on the client experience enhances a company’s reputation in the markets it serves. It directly relates to a company’s financial success by improving client retention and new client acquisition, and establishes a feedback loop that informs all other aspects of the experience.

This approach provides opportunities to learn about competitors by understanding the expectations of the clients won from them. It also affords companies the loyalty and patience of their clients when things don’t go exactly as planned.

Further, value and experience become more important to clients than price, which leads to increased profitability.


### What are the key elements of a client experience orientation?

It’s important to define minimum standards for interacting with all clients, ensure that

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end-to-end processes are client-friendly and offer the support clients need, when and how they need it.

Products should be designed with the most important clients’ needs in mind and client feedback integrated into the company’s investment road map for new technology, processes and product enhancements. Progress is mapped against client satisfaction measurements, which should be included in employee performance expectations.

Companies should align their best people with their best clients, which means involving the executive team. The best clients deserve to know the organizational leaders who are shaping the direction and the culture of the organization. Help clients get to know leadership through articles, videos and in-person introductions.

Also, share stories of client successes internally — the times clients have been delighted and service exceeded expectations, but also times when service fell short.

### How is the orientation developed?

The client experience orientation starts from the initial client interaction. Relationship owners and teams on both sides should talk to understand expectations, find alignment on the relationship objectives, define the metrics and measurements of progress and a plan for the frequency of interaction —

too frequent can be just as harmful to the relationship as not enough.

Leverage everything learned to understand the trends and insights about all clients, and incorporate this data into product and process refinements.

### Who should be involved in developing the client experience approach?

The client experience is part of the culture of the organization, so the entire leadership team needs to be involved. Management must buy-in and become the advocates who push the focus into all parts of the organization, and reinforce it through their actions and recognition. From there, all employees and stakeholders need to embrace the focus, including vendors. They are an extension of an enterprise and need to have the same client experience focus.

### How does an organization know the client experience strategy it created is working?

Metrics and measurements will show that client satisfaction is improving. Client acquisition and client retention improve, and both clients and employees are proud to be aligned with the company, share their pride and be advocates for the company. Spend time talking with staff about the expectation for the client experience. If that differs from the experience they receive today, create a plan to close the gap. ●