# Giving your clients options

Giving your client options as part of your business development process makes it easier for them to figure out what they want and at the same time builds your relationship with them. Offering options lets the client help you craft the plan they will eventually retain you to follow.

**Options help avoid "premature proposing"**
After initial discussions, you may feel a powerful urge to offer a proposal for how you could address the client's situation. You risk proposing too soon, before you know enough about the situation (See this previous edition to find out more about what you are looking for). At this early stage, you might unknowingly say something the prospect won't like. Or something another decision-maker or influencer you haven't met yet won't like. A premature proposal could end the whole process. Instead, offer two or three ways you could proceed – and explain that the best choice depends on facts that you don't yet know. With one step, you offer practical ideas and open the door to additional fact-finding.

**Options elicit information**
Providing options is a gentle way to raise important issues. The client's responses to a few hypothetical directions or emphases sheds light on the factors most important to them in making their decision.

**Options help frame a recommendation more clearly**
Options throw a particular recommended approach into high relief. By suggesting Option 1 in favor of both Option 2 and Option 3, you can point out the considerations behind your recommendation. You point out recommended approach's shortcomings and the advantages that outweigh the shortcomings. If the client may also be considering a different mix of costs and benefits, e.g., a slower pace or lower quality for less money, you can be ready to share that option too as a legitimate alternative.

**Options show you take their input seriously**

Providing options demonstrates you are taking their input seriously. Rather than just plowing ahead, you are asking questions. Rather than just asking questions, you are organizing questions in ways that help them uncover what they want.

**Options keep the client shaping the action**

On important matters, most people like choices. Making choices gives them the sense – justifiably – that they are influencing their conversation with you. As a result, they can keep any fears of "losing control" from getting too strong.

**Joint decisions (about options) provide a path back through the woods**

Each decision about how to move forward provides a landmark that marks your joint progress with the client. If the client ever feels the process has gone off track, you can revisit together each choice the client made and see if you had a mutually shared understanding at that moment. You can diagnose easily where you appear to have parted paths; you can start again from there with an intact relationship instead of a relationship and a project damaged by a misunderstanding.

Are there situations when just providing a proposal (even early on) is better than offering options? Sure. A good way to know if you're in one of them is to ask the client – "Would you prefer if I give you just one proposal or would you like some options on how to proceed?"

# Something to try this week

Think about one of your ongoing business development opportunities where you have been thinking about making a specific proposal? Consider offering some options instead? Is this a good idea - why or why not?