

The Getting Naked Approach in Action

Service providers that are able to be completely vulnerable (or naked) with clients are rewarded with levels of loyalty that other service providers can only dream of. Getting naked with a client is often scary and uncomfortable. Here are just a few of those moments -- as told by Patrick Lencioni:

Enter the Danger

I once worked with the leadership team of a software company, a group of extremely intelligent and driven people. After watching them struggle with the issue of lead generation and marketing, I sensed that others in the room shared my confusion about the company's basic customer promise. I spoke up and said, "I'm sorry, but I just don't understand your value proposition. Am I the only one, or is this confusing to you guys too?" At first, a few of the executives looked at me like I was a moron. Just as I was ready to admit my mistake, the head of customer service said, "I don't get it either," followed by a handful of other key executives who admitted their confusion too.

Ask Dumb Questions

Once I was in a relatively tedious meeting with an executive team that was reviewing their budget for the year. As I looked over the spreadsheet that they were reviewing, I noticed that in the marketing area there was no line item for advertising. Since the company had just gone public, it seemed strange that they wouldn't be doing any advertising, so I raised my hand and asked about it. A new colleague of mine who was also in the room at the time later told me that he was mortified by my question. He thought to himself, "Come on, of course these people thought about advertising. It's probably just buried within one of the other marketing categories."

He was as surprised as I was when the CEO responded to my question by turning to the marketing V.P. for an answer. The head of marketing looked a little stunned and said "well, I wasn't sure if you wanted us to do any advertising this year..." And so they clarified the situation and moved funds into that part of the budget. The executive team thanked me for helping them see something they had missed. Still, I had been completely prepared for them to say "you knucklehead, of course we thought about advertising. It's right here under..." It was only me being okay with that potential reaction that I was able to help them.

Take the Bullet

I once worked with a large, international client and helped them plan worldwide leadership and strategy conferences. My responsibility included setting the agendas, creating content and organizing the various activities for the hundred or so executives who attended. During one event, my client became concerned that the event was falling behind schedule and implored me to interrupt the presenters and push them to wrap up their talks. Finally, he poked me in the ribs and said "tell him to hurry up!" I turned on the microphone I was carrying and very kindly asked the presenter to finish up in the next five minutes, only to have that presenter unleash on me a few angry and insulting comments in front of a hundred senior executives. I turned to see what my client would say, only to watch him disappear out the door to the conference center, leaving me alone to absorb the heat.

Later, that client acknowledged the uncomfortable situation, even though he didn't come right out and apologize. However, he demonstrated his gratitude through his loyalty to me and my firm, and his general level of appreciation for everything we did for him. And as awful as that moment was, I came to the conclusion that we had helped him by mitigating a potentially damaging situation for him.