

# Marketing and Technical Professionals Unite Building Internal Relationships That Create Mutual Success

By Deirdre Gilmore, CPSM

In business, we spend years of our lives with our work family. For those of us in professional services marketing, much of this time is spent with our technical counterparts (TCs for this article's purpose). Just like at home, if your family communicates better, life is better. Strong communication fosters an efficient, joyful, and productive relationship, whereas poor communication can destroy what makes work feel good, build resentment, and destroy opportunities.

The old marital wisdom, "Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?" echoes through my mind when I'm dealing with TCs. What strategies can I own and employ to help this relationship? How can I avoid falling into the blame game that can become a trap, especially when approaching a big deadline? I want to enjoy my work, and not worry too much about whether I'm right about a deadline or the importance of my contribution. Instead, like in a family and marriage, I want to build a foundation that allows all of us to succeed and feel good about the process. And just like my own family and marriage, this space requires many forms of excellent communication to exist.

There is no shortage of books, podcasts, TED Talks, and more, to help us reflect and improve our communication skills. However, which skills directly meet the

needs of the marketer and TC? Which improve the bottom line? Which are possible for us to own, so that we are not looking for corporate culture or a boss to make this happen for us? For this discussion, we will focus on four key communication principles that marketers and TCs can employ directly to strengthen their work relationships.

## 1. Effective communication starts with mutual respect and understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities, and goals.

As marketers, we are often relied upon to be the technical whisperers and I think, for the most part, we do that well. However, in my experience, I sometimes hear marketers bashing their TCs, focusing more on being right than creating a proper relationship for success. This pains me to hear, because my real-life marriage to an engineer provides me with an intimate understanding of a TC's motivations, fears, and day-to-day challenges, which can impact marketers on a daily basis.

The best way to gain mutual understanding is to spend quality time together. Shadow them in client meetings, go to onsite visits, camp out in their offices for a few hours and start to understand them. Get to know their challenges and processes. Once they feel like you understand them, they will also build understanding with you. During this time together, they get a better insight into what you do and how their behaviors impact you.

From the marketers' perspective, we are tired of feeling disrespected. How many

deadlines for vital information are missed? Were you working on a proposal last night while your TCs spent time with their families because you waited weeks for information from them? I know, it hurts. But here is the thing—our TCs are facing their own set of challenges. What many engineers won't tell you is that they are suffering from unreasonable billing ratios that are beyond their control, that many of them are nowhere near prepared to take on the marketing tasks assigned to them, and that one of their biggest fears is being wrong/looking bad. This leads to them behave in ways that negatively impact us. They want us to understand their time constraints and help alleviate them by being more proactive in proposals. They need us to work around their schedules so that they can meet their charge-out goals, keep their clients happy, and meet our expectations as well.

Our TCs are literally our clients. And if your firm is like any other, client satisfaction/experience is key. In our firms, we are great at getting to understand our clients, what their expectations are, and how we can tailor our services and processes to make them happy, so how are we doing this for our internal clients?

## 2. Build trust by having their back.

Communicating to show people you have their back is one of the best ways to strengthen a bond, but the key is knowing how.

Helping TCs rise in their careers is a clear path to gain respect. You can show them how learning—and being good at—marketing will boost their career. Have



TLCD Architecture office, Santa Rosa, CA. TLCD Architecture. ©Tyler Chartier Photography, tylerchartier.com.

their office and conduct an interview, getting some quality time in as well. One technique I have found highly effective is to shift my work hours to be available and present when they have time to work on a proposal—i.e., come in at noon but work until 9 p.m. By negotiating a time and place that is free of their other work responsibilities, I communicate that I have empathy and compassion for them, which is returned. I can also make the meetings more fun by making a game out of strategy meetings—prizes and all—and remove the feeling that their contribution is a chore. I can reframe how they see the task at hand, which earns me better outcomes and greater gratitude for not making their job more difficult than it already is.

These strategies make the difficult tasks and issues much easier to manage, and help the marketer take responsibility for the project and the relationship. When marketers and TCs are both able to give and feel respect when delivering award-winning proposals, that is the best marriage of everyone's efforts. By focusing on what you as marketers can do versus what the TCs should be doing, you create the culture in which everyone wants to work, and TCs want to help you. In marriage and marketing, this is the difference between being right and being happy. ■

marketing parties at lunch or after normal work hours where you host and teach engineers marketing/BD tips and tricks. Teach them how to network, show them competitors' proposals, and help them build presentations skills. And lastly, don't complain when they give you more work. You would never do that to a client. Try the "yes, but...." approach.

### **3. Listen actively to synthesize discussions in a healthy manner.**

One thing many of us marketers have in common is passion. We are excited about the work we do and want our counterparts to be just as excited. The thing is, TCs process information differently than we do. I had to learn that my TCs, for the most, need time to digest, think, re-think it some more and then take action, which means I need to do a lot of follow-ups to make sure we are on the same page—always in person versus text or email. These interactions build stronger trust and cooperation.

Another key to being heard is confidence. If I am not confident in meetings, why should I expect TCs to be confident in me? I had to learn that because I own all things

marketing, I had to fully take control of marketing meetings. This simple change in behavior lets them know who is in charge, and conversely, that they don't have to be for once. When you lead meetings, lead them in a manner they are used to: Have an agenda, bring purpose, and provide something tangible to the TCs. Furthermore, stand up and lead—which means bring a note-taker, so it is not you.

### **4. Learn positive negotiation techniques.**

Learning how to develop compromises that don't leave you feeling like you lost is a challenge for many of us. Flexibility in all relationships makes them more productive and enjoyable and fosters a culture that you may benefit from later in the project. Think, for example, how can you compromise on missed deadlines? Negotiating brings less pressure to be right and more overall happiness in the relationship.

Marketers can meet TCs halfway by starting the approach or narratives on proposals. If you give them a head start, that will help the writing process. You can take a stab at it alone, or go into



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Learn more during the session, "M Live! Marketing and Technical Professionals Unite: Building Internal Relationships That Create Mutual Success" on Thursday, August 1 at 3:15 p.m. in Washington, D.C., during the SMPS annual conference.

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