

ground rules

THE CLIENT - CREATIVE RELATIONSHIP

The following document is an effort to define the spirit of the relationship between a client and a designer or creative professional. Its purpose is simply to help establish guidelines that will help cultivate a fruitful and effective collaboration.

(Information based on "The Design Constitution" by Chuck Green, 2005.)

1. KNOW WHO'S BOSS

i. The Client is the boss. Though we hope most aspects of our relationship will not require a "boss-like" authority, once issues about our work are raised and aired, and we are still without consensus, we both acknowledge the people funding the work have the final say.

ii. If there is more than one person representing the Client, let's agree to determine from the start, which member of the Client's team has final decision-making authority. Particularly in the areas of style and tone, giving more than one person veto power often takes the edge off great work and distorts the message.

2. COLLABORATION IS YOUR FRIEND

The Designer is not just a decorator - they are skilled in the business of marketing and advertising, as well as the look and feel of a design project. Let's learn from each other and agree to build our relationship based on collaboration, rather than dictation.

The Client understands the underlying concepts, products and services associated with their organisation, whilst the Designer has a unique, untainted perspective that is worth sharing, so let's utilise our respective strengths and knowledge to our advantage.

3. KNOW THE OBJECTIVES

Form without function is not design. Just because something "looks good", does not mean it fulfils its task of communicating a specific message (even worse, sometimes it can convey the wrong message). There should always be a reason why things look the way they do.

The Client hires the Designer to make something happen. Let's begin our work together by determining what the Client expects to happen. Before the first word is written or the first layout is sketched out, let's outline these goals, in as much detail as possible and in a way that allows us to gauge when we are successful.

4. DESIGN FOR THE END USER

Let's agree to produce materials that appeal to the sensibilities of the audience/end user and remain open to the possibility that the solution that has the potential to get the best results may not appeal to us personally. Let's create something for the end user, not a personal artwork for the Client or the Designer.

5. CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

i. It is the Client's responsibility to establish goals, provide information, and to review and approve or reject concepts and finished work.

ii. Rather than dictate specific changes to a design (aka: over the shoulder design - "move this here" or "change that colour to", etc), let's agree the Client will request a new design or a variation of the original that addresses specific problems. Though it is helpful for the client to point out areas of the design that they believe are inconsistent with the sensibilities of their audience, let's agree not to do each other's jobs.

iii. Because the Client has final decision-making power, let's agree that the Client accepts ultimate responsibility for the correctness of content. It is the job of the Designer to produce materials that are as accurate as possible; however it is the sole responsibility of the Client to approve all aspects of the final work before it is published.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Let's agree that all of the information we share and the content of our communications remain confidential to protect the integrity of both the Client and the Designer.

7. RECONCILIATION

Let's agree how we will mediate disputes. Every relationship, especially one that entails so much communication and so many details, will inevitably suffer problems. Let's agree to address issues freely and allow space for each other to correct mistakes. If an impasse arises, let's agree to share it with each other first, and if necessary, to choose a mutually acceptable mediator.

8. REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN

Don't stress too much over a design, it's not good for your health. Enjoy what you're doing and remember to have fun. Celebrate the successful completion of the job.