



7 REASONS CLIENTS LEAVE AND HOW TO WIN THEM BACK

By Sue-Ella Prodonovich

When you're next [reviewing your business plan](#), I want you to take a moment to think about the clients you've lost over the past couple of years.

I know that might bring up some uncomfortable feelings, perhaps even some painful ones. But there's a reason I'm asking you to do this...

There's a very good chance at least some of those clients you haven't heard from in a while aren't yet lost forever.

In fact, they're probably a much easier pursuit for your business development efforts than going out and trying to find and woo new clients.

Studies also show that, winning back clients that left because of price, [are also much more likely to stay with you longer](#) next time around.

You just need to be a bit proactive about getting them back. Like using 'Propensity Models' to track lost clients, consider which would be the best fit to win back, the likelihood to re-engage, and who should do the 'winning back' work.

Because sitting around and waiting for them to return of their own accord is like leaving the porch light on for Harold Holt.*

Your first task is to find out why they left and assess the likelihood of their return. If you're unsure, be upfront and ask. What harm can it do?

Your second task is to hatch a plan for winning back those 'most likely' based on the reason they left in the first place. Here's how to do just that.

1. THE DECISION-MAKER LEFT

When a new person holds the purse strings, they often can the current service providers and replace them with their own trusted advisers. As the incumbent, you can quickly find yourself on the outer.

How to win them back. Not everyone from your time is likely to have left, so keep up the relationships with those who remain. Drop them an email or give them a call to find out how they're doing. Invite them in to your CPD sessions.



Also, don't be afraid to introduce yourself to the new decision maker (you could even ask one of the remaining 'friendlies' to introduce you) so that you can let them know about the work you've done and find out about the outcomes.

And, most of all, get in touch with the person who left who was feeding you work. You may be able to become their trusted adviser at their new place. In fact, this can actually be the very best scenario because played well, it can lead to double the work.

2. YOUR FIRM CHANGED

Often it's not the client that's changed, it's you. Maybe you altered your pricing structure. Maybe your brand changed. Maybe there was a change in ownership, or you were merged with an overseas firm.

Whatever it was, a disruption from your end can have profound implications for your client relationship. It can break the automaticity of your workflow with the client because it gives them cause to pause and reflect.

It could be that they loved you; they just didn't buy into your new brand or ownership, and you gave them a convenient excuse to break up.

How to win them back. It's your job to demonstrate the best things about your past relationship remain the same while spotlighting the advantages of your firm's change.

Following significant change you'll need to walk the talk of your rationale for a least 12 months. So, include familiar faces in your updates and ramp up your social media activity with news of the activities that excited you about the shift.

And be upfront about asking what it would take to win them back.

3. YOU CHANGED FIRMS

If you leave and change firms, there's no guarantee your star clients will follow you.

Perhaps they're locked into your old firm, or they don't want to interrupt the status quo. Maybe they even have a negative view of your new employer.

How to win them back. You have to accept that you're not going to take everyone with you when you move, and some that will come may take some time to come across. But there's still a lot you can do, like preparing for the hard questions and addressing concerns you know people will have.

[Read more about how to get old clients to follow you to a new firm here.](#) (It's my most viewed article ever).



4. THEY FOLLOWED A PARTNER TO A NEW FIRM

Perhaps one of your professionals walked out the door and took the client with them.

How to win them back. Keep [that porch light on](#) for clients who move on. This is a long game so don't burn your bridges. Invite them to your seminars. Send them your articles. Keep them on your mailing lists.

Maybe they'll find the grass wasn't greener. Maybe it won't work to plan. Keep up the communication and be patient...

5. THEY HAD TO FOLLOW RESTRICTIVE PROCUREMENT POLICIES

Sometimes you have to face the annoying fact that, even though your contact was very happy with what you did, they're just not allowed to use you anymore. Often that's because they have to follow organisation-wide procurement policies that force them to use panel providers.

How to win them back. No panel lasts forever. There will come a time when [there is another request for proposal \(RFP\)](#). Stay in touch to make sure you're invited to respond. In the meantime, let them know you're still interested in working with them where their policies allow.

Sometimes there are certain projects that organisations, including government agencies, for which they can go 'off panel'.

6. THEY STOPPED FEELING THE LOVE

Unfortunately, sometimes clients leave simply because they feel like they're being taken for granted. Alternatively, the relationship just goes a bit stale and someone newer and shinier steps in.

How to win them back. A while ago (we're talking pre-Covid times), I was fortunate enough to hear Rich Gotham of the NBA team Boston Celtics tell his story about turning around the franchise. It was one of the most insightful and fascinating talks I've ever heard.

Gotham talked about how the Celtics serviced high-value clients by focusing their attention on periods when it mattered most. He also talked about segmenting their sponsor base according to the length of time they'd been engaged and then concentrating on 'inflection points' when clients are most likely to get itchy feet and what you need to do to make them see ongoing value in your service.

[Read the article I wrote about it, 'How to Maximise Profits When Competition Is Fierce'.](#)



7. YOU LET THEM DOWN

Maybe they left because you weren't able to meet their demands or expectations. Maybe you didn't have the expertise needed to do something to the level they wanted. Maybe you didn't understand the internal drivers of their organisation or their KPIs. Maybe it was just a bad time for your practice.

How to win them back: Letting a client down is probably the hardest one to come back from. But it's not impossible. Fess up and acknowledge that you disappointed them, then let them know how you've changed.

Offer to sweeten the deal if you have to. Or introduce someone else as the potential Client Relationship Partner.

Pursuing a client you disappointed in the past isn't wasted time. They're likely to remember the good work you did for them in the past. Even if they can't hire you now, they may refer someone to you who can.

THE REWARDS SHOULD BE WORTH IT

Pursuing lost clients isn't madness, it's an essential part of doing business. You won't be able to win back everyone but you'll at least still be on good terms.

Even those who won't, or can't, come back to you may know someone who will.

Give them every opportunity to make that introduction. Word-of-mouth is still king when it comes to building a successful practice.

WANT MORE?

If you'd like to know more about business development for your practice, [get in touch](#).

**The quote comes from Rugby League Coach Jack Gibson, who compared waiting for the Cronulla Sharks to win a premiership like 'leaving the porch light on for Harold Holt'. For my international readers, Harold Holt was Australia's 17th Prime Minister. In December 1967, he went swimming in rough seas and was never seen again, presumed drowned. He is now commemorated by the Harold Holt Memorial Swimming Centre in Glen Iris, Melbourne. [I'm serious.](#)*



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 - How To Maximise Profits When Competition Is Fierce
 - How to Get Old Clients to Follow You To A New Firm
 - Why You Should Say 'Yes' to Your Next Proposal



Sue-Ella is the Principal of Prodonovich Advisory, a business dedicated to helping professional services practices sharpen their business development practices. She works with professional services firms that focus on positive client relationships, and with individuals who want personal, intelligent support.

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