My colleague recently took a trip to the mountains of North Carolina for a long weekend with his new fiancée. He had reserved a cute little cabin in the woods on Airbnb and looked forward to some quiet down time. After a four-hour drive, they arrived – it was beautiful! The instructions in the Airbnb app said the key would be under the flower pot. But… there was no flower pot. They looked in all the usual places, and no key would be found.

Tired, frustrated, and anxious, my colleague fired up the Airbnb app and pressed the button to reach customer service. He explained the situation, and got this reaction:

> *Wow, I'm so sorry! That's got to be frustrating. Tell you what, it's dinner time – I'm texting you ten highly-rated nearby restaurants. Go grab dinner, snap a picture of the receipt and send it to me – we'll reimburse you up to $50. While you two eat, I'll get this figured out for you.*

Sure enough, by the time dinner was over, the cabin's owner texted, apologized, and told them where the key had been relocated. They got back to their private getaway, got in easily, and enjoyed their weekend.

What could have been a terrible experience that likely would have prevented a customer ever returning became instead a great success story and source of fierce loyalty.

Ask your front-line client facing staff this question: "If you were the call center agent, what would YOU have done?"

They may come up with a compelling answer, eventually. Odds are, they'll be stumped. More than likely, they won't develop a great answer in the critical seconds it takes to respond to a customer, on the phone, in real time.

The Airbnb employee was able to quickly come up with a great solution because Airbnb has a plan for this. They have customer experience architects who think through the customer's experience – from signing up for the app through post-stay engagement. Airbnb even hired a Pixar storyboard artist to make four-panel cartoons of each critical moment in the customer's journey to communicate clearly to the staff "THIS is how we do things here."

Airbnb uses an intense focus on customer experience to redefine an entire industry, shaking hoteliers and disrupting billions of dollars in old-way thinking.

What if, just what if, someone in your industry did the same thing? Most professional services firms are steeped in tradition, in conservative methods, and focused so much on the professional they haven't stopped to really, truly, focus on the services. Even the "innovative" firms focus most innovation on technical practices, not on the client's experience.

What happens if you do? What happens if your biggest competitor gets there first?

If you want to get started on your client experience (CX) journey, or even just explore what CX means, here's an easy place to get started – with minimal time, zero cost, and big returns.

In the weekly/regular team meeting you're part of, lead a CX Moment – a literal minute to talk about just ONE experience a client faced with your firm that week. Or, perhaps discuss an upcoming experience you want to get right. We do this at our firm. During one meeting, a conversation began regarding a great client who was 120 days past due on an invoice. We launched a CX Moment right then, asking "what do we want our client experience to be when trying to collect late payments?" We had a great conversation that led us to a few simple tweaks in our process. We turned the collection call into a relationship-building moment – and we trained the whole team on it in five minutes. CX Moments are free, and start building awareness and energy across the company. The incremental improvements also create happier, more satisfied clients as service starts to change for the better.

Be sure to share successes across the company. When a CX moment from the meeting leads to a positive client reaction – tell the world! Specifically highlight successes that those lower in the organization discover. Recognizing their contributions to both the firm and the client will develop a cadre of "loyalists" – a grassroots movement by those who get it. They'll start sharing more of their own ideas to enhance the client experience and build deeper client loyalty.

Also share successes with the executive team. Teach them to include CX Moments in their meetings. Executive participation will take a grassroots movement and turn CX into a strategic priority.

You can take this one step further and begin asking for "Client Success Stories." These are NOT moments where your firm did something great. These are specific examples of how you helped your *client* do something great.

For example, I recently spoke with a client. We had helped them set up a project-based client feedback process. This firm noticed they had lost a couple proposals with a long-time client of theirs, but didn't get anything more than cliché reasons why during the loss debriefs. They decided to send a feedback survey on an un-related active project, and found a couple of serious concerns the client was not voicing. After a meeting to address the concerns, the firm won a multi-year $1.5 Million project a few weeks later.

The success was completely owned by my client. I may have provided tools and training, but they activated on those resources, used them well, and created a massive financial gain as a result.

A great client success story focuses on a success that was created by the client; your role was an enabler to help them realize that success.

Your team may find it hard at first to distinguish between a client success and something cool your own firm did. Keep pushing for the right kind of stories.

The discipline of making everyone in the room think about success from the client's perspective will drive empathetic thinking, and shift behaviors to be more focused on what the client is actually trying to accomplish. Recognizing a client's success is a nuanced and subtle step. Once implemented, these stories create energy towards CX and client success.

When your leaders see the potential that CX brings, ask them to talk about CX: all the time. Together, begin emphasizing and creating a culture of the client.

Why focus on CX? We are living in an experience economy. You are not being compared to your biggest competitor. Experiences are emotional and personal – and from an experience perspective you're being compared to *each client's last great experience*, *anywhere*. That could be with Airbnb, Uber, Ritz Carlton, or any other of the leading-edge innovators in the experience economy.

Professional services firms that have implemented CX strategies are three-times as likely to realize substantial growth in revenue and profit, twice as likely to be referred by their clients, and seven times less likely to lose a key client. These firms are more likely to attract and retain both the best clients and the best employees. Employee engagement goes up. Client emergencies that interrupt weekends and family vacations go down. Nearly everything in the business improves when everyone knows to make the clients' experience a priority.