The Dreaded Question

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Most of us can think of a question – or perhaps several questions – we'd prefer never to be asked. That can be true in our client relationships too.

Picture, if you will, an account you've served for years. Like most clients, financial pressures intensify from time to time. They are thinking critically about their costs, staffing, overhead and general productivity. They take their obligation seriously to be productive managers and prudent buyers of goods and services. Everything is on the table.

In the midst of this thought process, a "C-level" executive happens to be deep in thought staring out her office window just as your onsite manager walks by on the campus below. She has a few minutes before her next meeting so she calls your manager's cell phone and watches as he answers it. *"Would you mind coming up to my office for just a moment please?"*

Once inside, she greets him warmly but thoughtfully, and asks:

"Your firm has served us for quite some time. I assume that you, and they, are satisfied with the profit you make from our account, but it's a significant part of our budget. As we take a close look at everything we're doing, please excuse my bluntness, but tell me, why are you worth what we are paying you?"

Gulp! Is this a question that we should dread or welcome? Are our people prepared to respond to it if asked? Do we tend to simply hope that it will never be posed?

As practitioners and advocates of the Clients for Life® client retention process, Tenacity believes the question is not only legitimate, but should be viewed as an opportunity to substantiate and reinforce our value. Indeed, if we have been conducting effective *Expectations Sessions*, operating well and documenting our progress and results against their prioritized corporate expectations, the answer should be evident. It might sound something like the following:

"Thank you for that question. Of course it is a fair one and we welcome it. Indeed, we wish all of our clients would be regularly asking it. Here's our approach.

*As you know, we conduct **Expectations Sessions** each year with your key stakeholders where they agree on specific and measurable expectations of our performance and their priority. This is our mutual understanding of how you, as a company, have defined the value in our relationship.*

We review our progress and accomplishments quarterly against these expectations and we document and report on the results. I have copies of this documentation going back to the beginning of our relationship. I'd be happy to provide this to you and I think you'll find a compelling history of our relationship. We are pleased with our accomplishments in meeting and exceeding these expectations here, but pleased even more that the people on your side of the desk continue to affirm our value as your partner. I would say it is their active engagement with us in creating, sustaining and affirming this value that makes us worth what you pay us. Can we schedule a time to review this in detail with you?"

OK, I know what you're thinking… *wow, I wish we were in a position to say this with every single client we have!* *Even more, I wish that our account managers would not only have this information, but also be able to articulate it in this way.* (Of course, if they were, any retention issues you might have would probably be melting away right now.)

OK then, you can probably guess what we're thinking at Tenacity. *"Why not? Let's equip them!"* We'd be pleased to talk with you about that.