

Setting Client Expectations

QUESTIONS FOR PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS

QUESTIONS FOR PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS

1. Do you like the way your home is arranged/laid out now? What don't you like about the arrangement? What would you like to see differently? This question is being asked in order to elicit information regarding client lifestyle and sense of style.
2. Which shelter magazines do you enjoy reading/looking at? Again, the point here is to elicit information regarding sense of style. If they don't have any/read any, offer to buy a few and ask them to put *Post-It Notes* on the rooms they like/want.
3. What do you want out of an interior designer? What do you want the designer to do for you? The goal here is to listen to what the client is saying/wants and then set appropriate expectations.
4. When the client asks the designer "how much will this cost?" "I don't know is not the answer." The designer may say that specific project cost discussions are beyond the scope of this meeting. And that the designer does not want to make a commitment that she cannot honor. Instead a possible response might be that the project costs will be determined based on the direction that the client wants to pursue. The designer can give an example of the cost to furnish the living room in the client's house, assuming that this room is one being considered for redesign, using a range of prices in order to inform the client as to the complexity of the budgeting process. The point here is to educate the client as to the intricacies of the process of conceptualization through installation. Discuss fee structure-hourly design fee or flat fee and what is covered; hourly drafting fees; hourly travel fees; designer's markup, which covers administrative fees that are incurred in running the project, ordering, tracking, etc.
5. When presenting the interior designer's portfolio, explain that the rooms are representative of someone else's taste. It is the designer's job to turn the client's taste into a livable environment using the designer's aesthetic to create the style that the client will like.
6. Who else will be working on the project? (architect, trades people, children) There could be other people that the client has promised to work with or the inevitable friend who is an expert in everything, but doesn't actually do anything for a living. Have you hired anyone else yet? Make sure that your project will not be hindered by other commitments the client has made.
7. If a client poses objections to working with a New York City designer who must travel some distance to the project site, counter that as a designer who lives in the city, "I am closer to the sources which translates into cost savings for you." Additionally, the designer may negotiate some variation in fee structure depending upon the purpose of the visit to the job site. Perhaps being out at the job site for an installation can be charged at a lower fee than working with the client re furniture selection and layout. Perhaps in some cases the designer can "comp" the client Travel Time to the job site for which she usually charges. Finally, the designer may ask the client why she feels the need for a designer to have offices in her area; what are the client's specific needs for a local presence.

8. What is your project timeline? When would you like to begin and end? Are there any special events you would like this completed for? This is the best time to align expectations on delivery. If you know in advance that something is not realistic, inform the client and educate them to the process. There are plenty of clients in a rush with more money than them!
9. Do you have a figure in mind for the budget? Of course they do! Even the richest people have an idea of what they are willing to spend. Unless they write you a blank check, know your limits. You don't want to wind-up in Vanity Fare unless the article is saying that you are the best designer in the world!
10. Is there someone else who will be approving selections? Budget? Like a husband, review committee, or anyone who the client will be consulting, whether officially or unofficially. Do you need multiple copies of your proposals for other people? If there are other decision makers, make sure that you clearly define turn-around time on proposals and invoices, being very clear about possible delivery/installation delays.
11. If initial consultation takes a direction toward the conceptualization stage of the design process, the designer may indicate that the discussion is beyond the scope of this meeting.
12. If the designer wants the project, she should ask for it. Can say that other designers can do this, but that you would like the opportunity to work on the project.
13. Why did/didn't you choose me? Find out about your strengths and weaknesses. If you get the project, make sure you repeat what you did well for the next interview. If you didn't, make sure you don't repeat things that are avoidable in the future. Remember: You don't want every project that comes your way. You must have the right client matched with your abilities to assure a successful outcome and future REFERRALS!