

# CLIENTS AND THEIR NEEDS

Your clients' needs are the same as the needs of most people. That is, they have the need to socialize, the need to feel good about achievements, the need for acceptance, and other such needs. These needs often coincide with the individuals' values and goals. They're the reasons clients call an interior decorator. These values are reflected in decorating as

- *Products and services.* People want items to reflect their level of prosperity.
- *Accomplishment.* People feel they deserve a reward for their efforts.
- *Beauty.* People want their rooms to look as if they go together.
- *Recognition.* People want their decorating work to be a status symbol.

## Who Will Be Your Clients?

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Clients today have a wide variety of home fashion needs. A large part of your job will be helping clients choose furnishings and accessories for their homes. You must understand who your clients are and how to serve them. This section of your study unit focuses on the elements that have an impact on decorating.

Individuals or groups of people who are seeking the services of an interior decorator are considered *prospective clients*, or *prospects*. People choose to use a decorator for a variety of reasons. Events occur that may prompt people to seek the services of an interior decorator. Some of these events are

- New construction
- Remodeling
- Relocation
- Change in family
- Wedding

- Birth of a child
- Children moving out
- Promotions
- Graduation
- Retirement

These events mark critical times in which people make major changes. Individuals experiencing these events may even take on new personalities, and they may want to express themselves in a new environment (Figure 14).



**FIGURE 14—A lifestyle change like relocation may mean decorating changes.**

Your clients will look to you for answers to questions, solutions to problems, and suggestions on products. As a room in a home develops, so does the relationship between your clients and you as the decorator. Once this relationship is established, it can span over years of repeat business.

Wealthy families generally use the support of professionals—lawyers, accountants, landscapers, and decorators. Today, more middle-income families also understand the benefit of using these professionals.

## Needs and Desires

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Your clients wish to express their values in their interiors. Therefore, they must have the *need* for your products and services. However, they must also have a *desire* to own those products and services—and the financial ability to afford them.

You'll probably discover that your decorating clients come from a variety of different economic and social levels. Some clients may need a great deal of your service, but they may be unable to afford as much as they need. Other clients may be able to afford more help than they need.

The requests that your clients represent to you depend on a number of factors:

- Social status
- The need to make a personal statement
- The need for approval from friends and family
- Comfort level needed or desired
- Funds available to invest in decorating

## Identifying Your Clients

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One of your first tasks as a decorator will be to identify people who meet the criteria for being prospects. Three factors are important in this determination: financial ability, character traits, and personal preferences.

**Financial ability.** The major factor in determining prospective clients is their financial ability. As already mentioned, clients may come from a wide range of economic levels. In addition, the wealthy clients may come from old money. These clients have a long history of heritage to uphold. On the other hand, they may have new money and be rising in career and social status. Clients may be accomplished professionals—doctors, lawyers, and in many cases, entrepreneurs—who work hard to create and sustain a quality lifestyle.

**Character traits.** Your clients' outlook plays a large part in their decorating style. Clients can be

- *Optimistic*, thinking everything looks great
- *Pessimistic*, sure that nothing is ever right
- *Realistic*, seeing everything for what it is—nothing more or less

As a decorator, try to identify where your clients fit into this list. Then, you'll be better able to meet their needs and thereby make a sale.

In addition to these three traits, you may occasionally have clients who are innovators. *Innovators* want to be the first to have something new. On the other hand, your clients may fall into the *mainstream*. These clients wait until a style is proven successful before they'll use it. Of course, your clients can also lag behind. They may wait, be unsure, and ponder your ideas for some time.

Finally, watch out for insecure clients who make you feel the need to take charge. Be careful to consider these clients' needs and desires. Don't impose your own preference on them.

Be sure to pay careful attention to your clients' personalities and act accordingly when you're dealing with them.

**Personal preferences.** In dealing with clients, you must also determine their personal preferences in styles of interior decorating. There are three environmental preferences you'll find among clients:

- *Elegant* (a tasteful, refined style)
- *Functional* (a no-frills style that serves a purpose)
- *Relaxed* (a casual, comfortable style)

## The Bottom Line

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The truth is that clients need a decorator to help them define their style and give them the courage to make decisions, as well as avoid costly mistakes. This process needs to be

accomplished with a minimum of inconvenience. It should be done within a reasonable, agreed-upon period. Also, it should stay within an affordable price range.

### ***Watching the Trends***

Whenever you think about a design, be sure you consider the current trends. Even if you don't abide by them, your work will always be judged in relation to them, so you have to know what they are. Trends in decorating are so present in the culture that they often affect us in subtle ways. You may not even realize you're following a trend until you notice a photograph in a magazine of something that you thought was your great idea!

## **The Impact of Change**

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A *change* is an alteration, a transformation, or a substitution—and changes can occur in many different degrees. A person may choose to use a decorator for a minor change, a major change, or an in-between change. The factors that make change occur in a client's life are influenced by the passage of time.

People employ decorators in building and remodeling projects as well as redecorating, product replacement, and updating projects. The interior decorating industry is fast-growing and always changing. New, updated products require decorators to stay constantly informed in their specialty area.

A number of products have changed due to technology, laws and regulations, and lifestyles. Some of these products fall into the areas of

- Security and safety
- Comfort and style
- Recreation and hobbies
- Physical fitness
- Workstations

For example, the slats on an infant's crib are required by law to be a maximum number of inches apart. If they're any farther apart, an infant's head could become caught between the slats. If you're a decorator who specializes in nurseries, safety is an area in which you must stay informed.

Home offices fall into another area where a decorator can be helpful. In most homes today, computers are an important part of family life. Decorators are expected to work these computer systems into the decorated space. Workstations are as common as entertainment centers. It's essential to know the current merchandise available for these areas.

Today's decorators must help their clients with more than aesthetic choices—that is, choices that focus only on appearance. Decorators must also help their clients make good decisions that satisfy their needs and fulfill their desires.

### ***16,000 Ideas in Images***

GetDecorating.com is a site unlike any other. It boasts more than 16,000 photos of actual homes designed, decorated, and landscaped by both architects and interior decorators and designers. When you're brainstorming ideas, you'll find this site to be absolutely priceless! To try it out, go to

<http://www.getdecorating.com/>

## **Your Professional Reputation**

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Your professional reputation as an interior decorator will be based on these principles:

- *Ethics* (a set of moral principles or values)
- *Integrity* (strict adherence to a code of moral or artistic values)
- *Honesty* (adherence to the facts)

Although these principles have different definitions, you can see that they're related. They all include an element of trust. That is, a person with good ethics is a person you can trust. The same is true for a person with integrity and honesty.

People want to work with a decorator they can trust. If you speak to people who have used decorators, you'll find them describing their decorators in a variety of ways:

- “My decorator was somewhat expensive—but worth it.”
- “The decorator was so easy to work with.”
- “We couldn't have done it without our decorator.”
- “My decorator helped me get everything I wanted.”
- “My decorator always came through for me.”
- “My decorator did what he promised to do.”

These are great comments a decorator would love to have clients say. On the other hand, a decorator wouldn't want clients to say things like this:

- “The job was way over budget.”
- “We were months behind schedule.”
- “My decorator didn't listen to what I was saying.”
- “I didn't think I could trust my decorator.”

Your reputation is greatly determined by what your clients say about you. The business of decorating is built on repeat customers and referrals, and referrals usually come from satisfied customers.

Today's consumers, more than any other time in history, are savvy about their purchasing decisions. This product sophistication and knowledge shouldn't intimidate a competent decorator. Your product knowledge and growing resource base will help build your confidence with every passing year.

In the 1940s and 1950s, decorators and manufacturers dictated styles. Marketing wasn't needed, because consumers bought whatever the manufacturers produced. Consumers didn't influence the products; manufacturers and decorators did. Rooms had the personality of the decorators, not the clients. People bought everything from one store, and followed the color trends set at the time.

Today, the reverse is true. People no longer buy the *product*; they buy the *benefit* of that product. The demand for benefit in today's home fashions is greater than ever. A benefit for your clients is something that fulfills their needs and desires. A benefit may be the need for privacy, ease of maintenance, comfort, entertainment, beauty, and so on.

You should consider your services and products for features, functions, and benefits. *Features* emphasize the most important part of your products or service. *Function* tells the client what they do. Benefits allow the client to determine why they want or need them.

Finally, your reputation can be determined by your own attitude toward your clients and their decorating problems. Maintain a positive attitude. Consider your clients' problems as your personal challenge. Be determined to solve them for your clients. Having a positive attitude can also help you to enjoy researching and finding available options, presenting the ideas to your clients, ordering the products, and getting them installed correctly. A decorator with a positive attitude never gives up (Figure 15).



**FIGURE 15—A decorator with a positive attitude will gradually establish a good personal reputation.**



# Self-Check 4

1. List at least five events that might cause a person to seek the services of an interior decorator.

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2. *True or False?* Pessimistic clients would probably be happy with any room you design for them.
3. People want to work with a decorator they can \_\_\_\_\_.
4. *True or False?* The business of decorating is built on customer referrals.
5. How can laws affect product changes?

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**Check your answers with those on page 48.**

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