Symbioss
Transforming relationships, unlocking growth

Why satisfied clients still leave

Eight findings on client loss, and four conclusions worth acting on.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

01 80% say they excel; 8% of clients agree

In a Bain study, 80% of 362 organisations believed they gave clients a superior experience. Asked separately, clients said only 8% really did.

02 A survey score alone isn't enough

Fred Reichheld, who created the Net Promoter Score, now argues a survey score alone isn't enough, and reads client value from the accounts instead.

03 Most B2B clients are indifferent

60% of B2B clients are indifferent and liable to switch, Gallup finds. Only 29% are fully engaged.

04 Fully engaged clients have a higher value

Across all sectors, Gallup finds fully engaged clients are worth 23% more than average, and actively disengaged ones 13% less, on revenue and profit.

05 Engagement level predicts next year's revenue

At one professional services organisation, 60% of clients with low engagement declined by a fifth or more the following year, against 34% of highly engaged clients.

06 5% more retention gives 25% more profit

In financial services, Bain found that a 5% increase in client retention produced more than a 25% increase in profit.

07 Long-standing clients are worth more

Profit from a client rises with every year of the relationship, Reichheld and Sasser found. In one US case, a fourth-year client produced more than triple the profit the same client made in year one.

08 Client focus shows up in retention

Organisations Forrester classes as customer obsessed report 51% better client retention and 41% faster revenue growth than those it doesn't.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

01 Don't rely on the satisfaction survey

A satisfaction score tells you how the last piece of work went. It doesn't tell you whether the relationship has a future, which is the question the Board is actually asking. Watch behaviour instead: how often you meet, how quickly they reply, who attends and who has gone quiet. Drawn from findings 1, 2 and 3.

02 Treat disengagement as commercial risk

Disengagement is a commercial risk that currently appears in nobody's report. Give every important client a simple engagement check: a record of contact and a named person who acts when it tails off. The point isn't the record, it's that someone is obliged to notice. Drawn from findings 3, 4 and 5.

03 Quantify what each loss actually costs

Client loss is usually discussed as a disappointment rather than a number, which is why it rarely competes for budget. Work out what each of your main clients is worth over the next three years, and put that figure next to the cost of keeping them. Drawn from findings 6 and 7.

04 Act in advance of the complaint

Most clients who leave never complain, so a complaints process isn't an early warning system. Book the conversation you don't yet need. Drawn from findings 3, 4 and 8.

Sources by finding 01 Bain & Company, Closing the delivery gap (2005) · 02 Reichheld, Darnell and Burns, Net Promoter 3.0, Harvard Business Review (2021) · 03, 04 and 05 Gallup, B2B customer engagement research (2012 onwards) · 06 Bain & Company, Prescription for cutting costs · 07 Reichheld and Sasser, Zero Defections, Harvard Business Review (1990) · 08 Forrester, customer obsession research (2025). July 2026

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