

The Client Experience

An Interview with
Diana O'Brien, Managing Principal, Deloitte LLP

EDITORS' NOTE *As managing principal of Market Development responsible for clients, markets, industry, and regions, Diana O'Brien has a passion for delivering the best service and experience to clients and developing leaders. In addition to serving clients throughout her career, she oversaw the life sciences consulting practice and led Talent Development and Deloitte University, the organization's learning and leadership center. O'Brien is a member of the U.S. Executive Committee and Deloitte Consulting Board of Directors. Additionally, O'Brien serves several charities related to autism and helped support the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. She was also named one of the Leading Women of Greater Cincinnati by Leading Women Inc.*



Diana O'Brien

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How do you differentiate among the Big Four and to what do you attribute Deloitte's success?

The size and scale of our organization makes a difference, but what sets us apart is our focus on creating meaningful experiences customized to the needs of our clients.

In 2005, in collaboration with Millward Brown, we surveyed 1,500 C-Suite executives who were buyers of professional services – half were Deloitte clients, and half were not – to determine what differentiates the client experience. We identified that clients wanted service providers who were responsive, fielded the right team, provided understanding and perspective, and gave industry insight.

We established those attributes as the platform for the Deloitte Client Experience. Despite our focus on what clients wanted, we hadn't really moved the needle. So we looked deeper and found that clients wanted providers who were responsive at particular moments – live events, leadership

transitions, etc. The foundation for our client experience now is defining and creating "Moments that Matter" for them. We focus on recognizing the moments – those to which you respond and those that you create – and making the right move in them.

How close is the coordination among Deloitte's four businesses?

The businesses themselves are distinct but all innovate and develop services in the marketplace to respond to – and stay ahead of – our clients' needs.

Our Market Development organization helps to package those services based on our clients' business problems. Our leaders think through those problems and pull together services from our businesses to form a customized solution and exceptional experience for the client.

Clients don't think about how we organize internally to meet their needs. They want competencies to come together to solve their problems. It's on us to deliver a seamless and integrated experience.

Is your client base primarily large multinational companies or do you serve smaller growth companies as well?

We serve 70 percent of the Fortune 500, but we also focus on emerging clients – what we consider growth engines – as well as venture-backed firms.

The complexity of the environment that all of our clients are operating in requires that we understand organizations of all sizes.

Is there an understanding of the role that organizations like Deloitte play during an economic crisis?

The unsettled and complex business environment that we have experienced over the past few years has put professional services organizations in a position to set the standard for leadership and excellence. At Deloitte, our focus is to lead from the front; to put ourselves in a position where we are protecting investors and the public interest, instilling trust in the markets, building confidence with our clients, and striving for the highest quality.

Marketplace forces have given us the opportunity to think differently about what our responsibility is to our stakeholders. From client service, to talent development, to community involvement, we are committed to making America stronger.

When it comes to hiring, are you more focused on the candidate's skill set or the culture fit?

Candidates need a foundation of education and experience, but the cultural fit is important to success. You have to have a passion for learning and want to grow and to be challenged; without that, you won't be successful at Deloitte.

Also, as part of our culture, we encourage people to focus on their strengths and to be unique. Team leaders bring together people from diverse backgrounds and experiences to serve our clients because their wide-ranging perspectives add value.

At Deloitte, one can marry passion and competency really well, and even our learning programs can be organized around that. Deloitte University embraces people building on their own strengths, and on how to exploit them rather than mitigating their weaknesses.

What was the thinking behind Deloitte University?

It was a \$300-million investment in our professionals. The impact of our investment has elevated the leadership development of our people, the overall culture of our organization, and our client relationships to a level that I could not have imagined when it first opened.

Deloitte University is the heart and soul of Deloitte today. When you are there, you see the power of connections created by being on the campus, and how our collaborative learning environment allows professionals at every level to grow as leaders and better anticipate and address the business challenges of our clients.

Our clients also have the opportunity to experience Deloitte University. We hosted 300 clients since opening, and ensure that each client's experience is customized to meet their needs and spark insights, whether through our program to help executives in transition or think tank events to solve critical issues.

Deloitte University has also become a hub for community-based activities. Our people built 100 water filtration systems as part of a learning exercise, put together rocking chairs for nursing homes and teddy bears for a children's group, and built Habitat for Humanity homes.

How critical is it that your workforce mirrors your diverse client base?

We are focused on building an inclusive workforce that enables us to create high-performing teams with complementary strengths. By doing this, we bring our best thinking and best people to help solve our clients' most complex issues. It's about having the ability to bring diverse thinking and innovation to the table, and making moments that matter for our clients and our people. ●