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Florida Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

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Managing Expectations

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Managing Expectations

- Managing expectations is a collaboration

- It's blending the push of inserting our concept of how the process/policy works, with the pull of finding out what the customer really needs and wants.
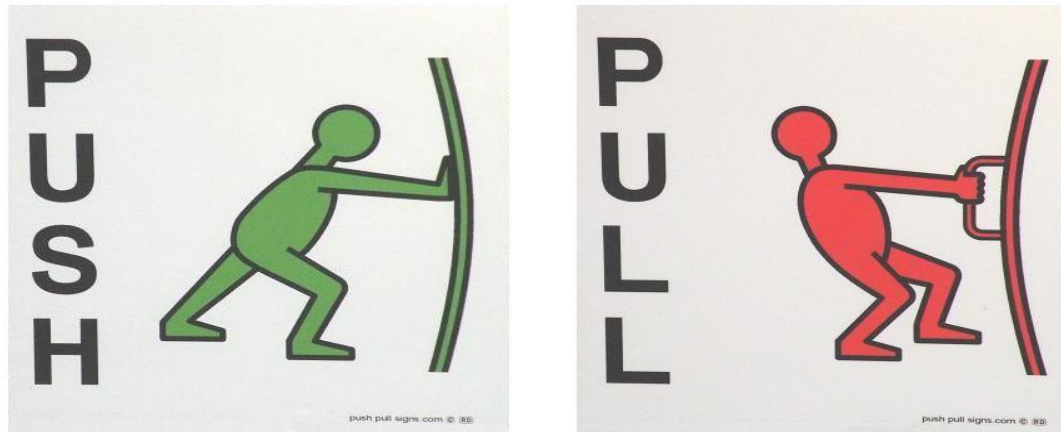

- Managing expectations is not about controlling the person; it is about setting you, the office, and the customer up for a successful partnership.

Where are the Gaps?

- There are three potential gaps in service:
  - Gap between what the person needs and what they ask

  - Gap between when the person initiates the request/completes the process and when the request can be completed/processed.

  - Gap between the what the person understood and what information was provided (verbal and written)

Where are the Gaps?
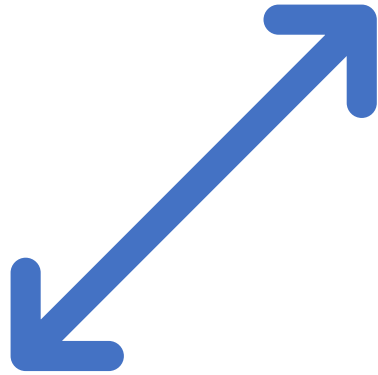
These gaps tend to expand and become more visible with the complexity of the and/or timing of when students/parents engage with our office to complete the process.

Each of these has the potential to generate repeated escalations, create dissatisfaction and ultimately become a costly event for both the customer and office.

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Guiding Principles

Expectations are influenced by many factors:	
Lifelong beliefs	Past experiences
Common sense	Wishful thinking
False assumptions	External pressures
The wisdom of those we trust	The slickness of those who mislead us
Departmental and organizational priorities	Management styles
Modes of operational and functional boundaries	Organizational cutbacks
Competitive pressures	Technological change

Shared Understanding

- Shared understanding is central to the successful management of expectations

- It's something your team should pay more attention to and engage in joint discussions regarding how to improve your ability to work more cohesively
  - **Internal:** financial aid office staff and managers
  - **External:** students, parents, division, foundation, & other university stakeholders

- This will improve your ability to meet others' expectations

The Expectations-Managing Framework

Communication

Managing Expectations

Information Gathering

Policies & Procedures
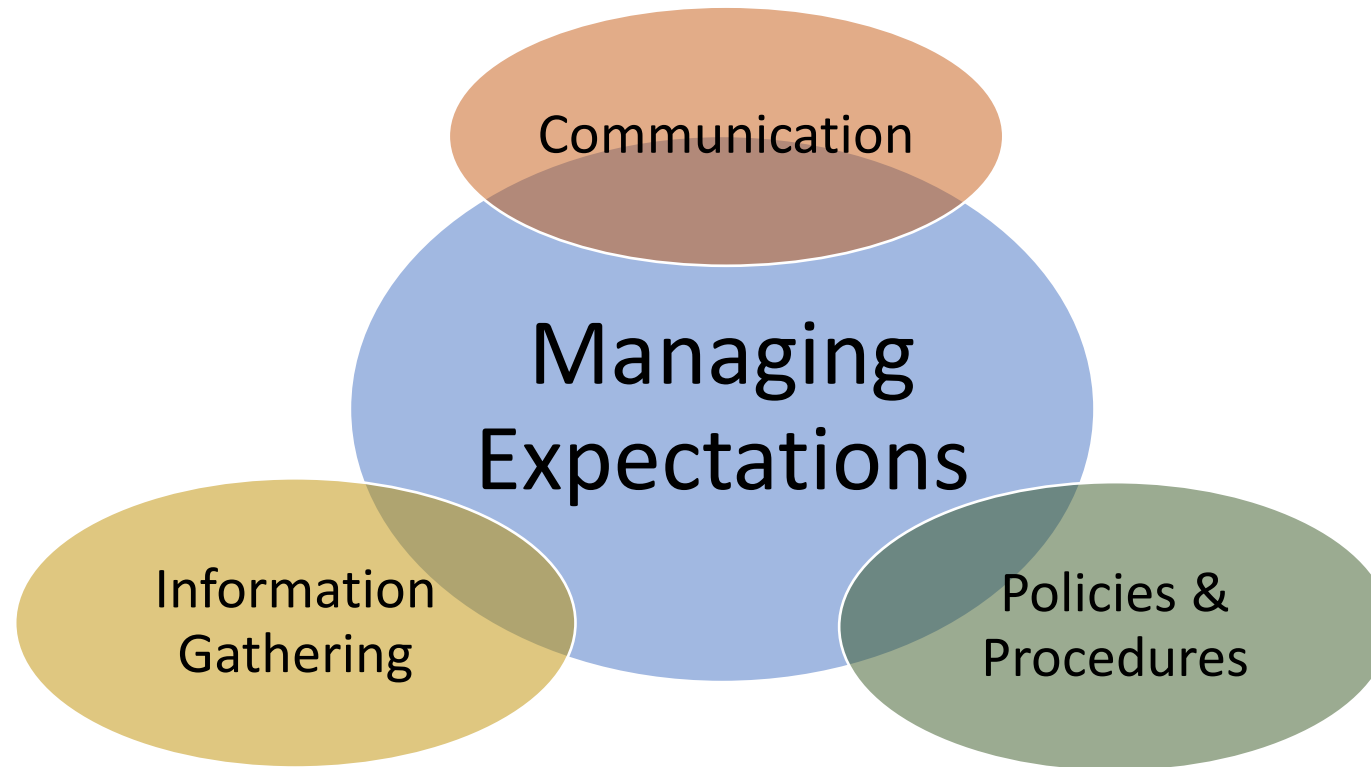
Communication Assumptions

- Check *ALL* Assumptions (yours and others) *AND* check them at the door:
  - How many times in life do we 'unsafely' assume we know yet we don't have all the facts?
  - Or we listen to others without checking the facts which informs our point of view.

- Try to ensure that the other person (s) has the same understanding of a project, deadline, task, or situation that you do.

- Engage with others who see things differently than you do.

- Seek multiple sources for facts ensuring a more accurate conclusion as you are not trusting one channel exclusively.

- Ask questions rather than making statements that put others on the defensive. Invite discourse. Bear in mind that you do not have to agree with what you hear.

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Communication: Use Jargon with Care

We can miscommunicate with others using:

- Technical Terms
- Familiar Language – differing definitions
- Ambiguous or Unclear Statements
- Misguided Labels

Misinterpret Customers' Language

- Get clarification from the customer because we often are speaking different languages

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Listen Persuasively

- Appearing Not to Listen
  - Dividing Your Attention
  - Looking at your computer or cell phone

- Demonstrating Listening
  - Eye Contact
  - Responsive Behavior
  - Leaning into the conversation

- Listening Actively
  - Listen Before Drawing Conclusions
  - Listen to Customers' Questions
  - Listen for Statements of Expectations

- Helping Customers to Listen
  - Either they have no stake in following your advice
  - Don't understand why they should follow your advice
  - Customer isn't taught how to perform the recommended task

Information Gathering

You can't meet someone's expectations if you don't know what they want.

This is *not a straightforward* process:

You can't just ask and assume you've been told what you need to know

What the customer needs may differ from what they *actually* need

You must make certain that your expectations are as reasonable and realistic as you want theirs to be

Helping Customer Describe Their Needs

- Sometimes customers believe they have described what they want but there are instances where they misjudge or misstate their requirements

- Frustration concerning customers who don't know what they want is widespread among those who serve and support customers

- You then have 2 choices
    1. You can maintain unrealistic expectations that your net encounter with your customer will be different or

    2. You can focus your efforts on helping customers do a better job of describing their needs
        - The 2nd choice will enable both you and your customers to bring expectations more closely in line with that is reasonably and realistically feasible

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Techniques for Describing Needs

Factor	Allow	Put	Offer	Provide
Factor stress into your interpretation of customers' descriptions	Allow for the difficulty of describing things	Put the most likely option first	Offer categories of descriptions	Provide a shared language

Become an Information-Gathering Skeptic

- Become an information-gathering skeptic, meaning, the customer may not say what they mean

- Clarify service requests & Challenge your assumptions
  - Take nothing at face value
  - Don't be concerned about appearing unprepared
  - Ask concrete questions
  - Gather information from multiple sources to fill in the gap
  - Consider the source (their capabilities and perceptions)

- Allow for inaccuracy

Understanding our Customers Context

- Understanding the customer's journey:
  - The *service* – in this case, you're looking for cracks in your customer's experience
  - The *experience* journey, you're looking at your customer's interaction with your service
  - The *decision* journey that led them to interact with you or your office
  - The *life* journey comes closet to the customer's personal experience

- Ways to expand your understanding:
  - What caused priorities to change?
  - What do you or the customer have control over and what do you or they not have control over?
  - What's unique about this person/department?
  - What interactions do you have with other departments or with outside organizations?
  - What would you like to change if you could?

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Solution Analysis

Positive Ramifications	Negative Ramifications	Evaluate Both Positive & Negative Ramifications	Impact Proceeding with a proposed solution	Other
What will the solution allow us to do faster, easier, cheaper, or better?	How might the solution demand more than meets the eye?	What aspects of the solution as initially envisioned now appear to be more important than we originally thought, and should be given particular attention?	What will this organization/department not be able to accomplish?	Before addressing this solution, what additional questions should we ask?
What factors make this solution attractive?	How might the solution have a negative impact on resources?	What aspects of the solution as initially envisioned now appear to contain flaws, and should be rethought?	What competitive opportunities will be missed? What is the cost or impact of these missed opportunities?	
What makes this the right time to implement this solution?	What unforeseen consequences might this solution create?	What other solutions should we consider?	What future crises or obstacles might not be avoided?	
How might the solution generate benefits that can't be fully foreseen?	What kinds of expectations might this solution create that could become difficult to satisfy?	What can we now conclude about this proposed solution? Should we proceed with it? Should we modify it?	What other business efforts will become more complex, more expensive, or more involved as a result?	
How is the solution similar to past endeavors that yielded broader benefits than expected?	What new problems might this project or solution create?			
In what ways might not otherwise be possible?				

Gaining Consensus and Achieving Buy-In

Generating buy-in may require meetings with various parties and giving each an opportunity to present his or her views.

Time consuming though it may be, soliciting these views is too important an activity to bypass.

Consensus doesn't always mean 100% agreement, but it can diminish the backlash and fallout that can occur from unilateral decisions

Try the Solution on For Size

Solution reviews can help identify the flaws and weaknesses in a proposed solution before you've invested too much effort in it.

Periodic reviews can offer helpful feedback about solutions, both when they're first proposed and as they are under development

Feedback from others can raise questions and offer perspectives you might overlook otherwise

Reflecting on a Job Completed

- A post-project review provides a structured way for you and the customer to assess what worked well and what didn't

- It revolves around questions such as:
  - How well were responsibilities divided between customers and staff?
  - To what extent was the problem accurately identified?
  - In what ways did the problem turn out to be something other than what it appeared?
  - What surprises emerged? How could they have been anticipated?
  - What were the most important lessons learned in carrying out this effort?
  - What should we do differently next time around?

Creating/Adjusting Policies and Procedures

- Your policy should be created/adjusted in:
  - Anticipation of a need
  - Response to a need

- You should use the above outlined steps as you create/adjust the policy or procedure

- Address how this will be rolled out? Will training be required? What communication needs to developed and sent and to whom?

- Monitor, review, and when necessary, revise (annually)

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Managing Expectations – Students/Parents

Students and Parents

Openly discuss solutions

- Providing possible solutions and/or resolutions, staff empower the student/parent to understand the complexity of a particular problem and engage directly with a solution.

- Additionally, by painting a clear picture of possible results, staff ensure students/parents have realistic expectations of how simple or difficult the solution and/or resolution will be.

Students and Parents

Be transparent and honest

Transparency is absolutely crucial to managing expectations effectively and will affect students/parents' ability to trust the information the office is providing.

Staff can ensure students/parents remain confident in the staff/office and have a positive student experience by remaining honest in every possible situation.

This means if a staff member doesn't have the right answer to a question/concern, he or she should be open about consulting with another staff member. Never guess.

Students and Parents

Remain optimistic, but realistic

- While optimism is an important part of a positive customer experience, staff must also remain realistic about solutions/resolutions.

- By understanding:
  - the complexities of financial aid
  - the interconnected of our processes
  - the workload of other areas of the office

- Staff members can better explain the timeframe for when a student's file will be reviewed, awarded, or aid disbursed.

- While it can be nerve-wracking to tell a student/parent their respective issue will take a certain period of time to be reviewed, it is more important to be realistic versus setting expectations that can't be met.

Students and Parents

Provide clear timelines

- Process and wait times can be irritating and in some instances costly for students.

- Students/parents will become more frustrated/angry if they look forward to their concern being resolved in a week, and instead wait 2 weeks or longer.

- Identify other mitigating issues that may be creating anxiety or frustration for student/parent

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Priority Dates and Communications
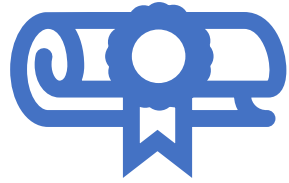
FAFSA Priority Date

If you have one, make sure it's clearly communicated to students (ie., website, electronic banners on campus, Student Union, emails, text messages)

Verification/Appeal Priority Date

Consider establishing & communicating when you would like students to have all of their documents submitted for the upcoming aid year.

- Simply saying as soon as possible could mean to a student the first day of classes.
- UCF's verification priority date is May 30th

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Priority Dates and Communications
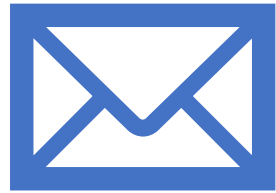
FAFSA completion reminders

Undergraduate Admissions may have a list of parents' email addresses they can provide.

Consider using the email address on the FAFSA.

Link to Financial Aid Videos

If you have any helpful videos regarding your offices processes include them in an email to the parents.

https://www.ucf.edu/financial-aid/resources/help-videos/

Communication Strategies - Students

Text Messaging

- Students will not read an email, but they will read a text.
- Use it for action items ONLY
  - Missing financial aid file items
  - Complete the FAFSA
  - Invitation to financial literacy events
  - Link to apply for scholarships
  - Reminder of office appointments (in-person or virtually)
  - Reminder to accept FWS for employment opportunities
  - Reminder to accept offered loans for those with an outstanding balance

Consider using FWS as your digital ambassador for social media posts

- Instagram & TikTok

Communication Strategies - Parents

Social Media - Facebook

- Create a Facebook page that they can like – not add comments. ☺
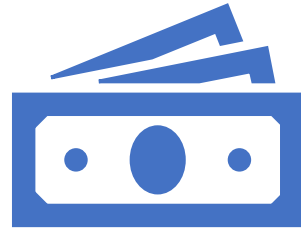- You can add great reminders for parents.

Emails with reminders

- Completing the FAFSA
- Completing a PLUS Loan application (prior borrowers)

Text messages

- Reminders with links for more information

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Communications Strategies - Parents

Financial Aid Website

Consider creating a parent page

https://www.ucf.edu/financial-aid/resources/parent-family/

Create timelines

Establish dates for when things should be done and send this to parents.

https://www.ucf.edu/financial-aid/resources/timeline/

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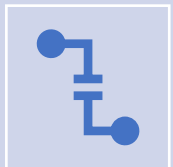
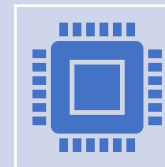# Customer Service Debriefings
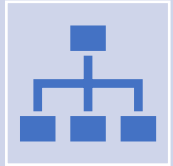
Managers/Supervisors to include those who manage processing operations

Discuss complaints, questions, concerns from students and parents

There may be unintended consequences with your current processes and/or communications

This is a **_great opportunity_** for customer service and processors to find common ground & changes to current policies/procedures

Managing Expectations – Staff

Staff – Emphasize Objectives

What are your departmental or divisional goals/objectives?

Have they been clearly defined and articulated to staff?

Do they understand how they FIT in with fulfilling these goals/objectives?

- How many files should your team review and complete weekly?
- How many appeals should your team review and complete weekly?
- What role does your team have with assisting students in the orientation process?
- What steps are you taking to move the university/division goals and objectives forward?
  - Does you team feel part of that process?

Staff – Establish Expectations

Have staff expectations been established early in the process?

Are we reacting to an unforeseen challenge, problem, or glitch?

Does your team understand their exact role in meeting the expectations?

- Do you have regular meetings to check-in on where staff are in the process and any challenges they are experiencing?
- Do you request their feedback (informal or formal)?

Do you provide meaningful feedback?

- Employees internalize and implement management feedback when it's relevant.
- Provide messaging supported by examples.
- Illustrate how they fit in this process and why their efforts make a difference.

Staff – Team Expectations

- Team expectations are not the same as team goals.
  - Goals are typically tasks that need to be accomplished
  - Team expectations are for the behaviors that occur while the team accomplishes said tasks.
- Established team expectations are necessary for the group to be productive and work cohesively.

• Respect **each other**, be courteous and sensitive to everyone's needs and concerns.	• **Be open** to constructive feedback without being defensive or negative.
• Be accountable for ***your*** work.	• Be self-motivated and reliable.
• Be flexible about job and task assignments.	• Share ideas for improvement.
• Be willing to help each other instead of displaying an ***"it's not my job"*** attitude.	• Be cheerful, positive and encouraging to other team members.
• Ask for help when needed.	

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Establish Staff Expectations

1. Determine what your expectations are - Before you can have a conversation with your staff members, you need to have a conversation with yourself and write down what your realistic expectations are.

   - For example, you may expect staff members to do the following:
     - Complete projects within the given timeframe.
     - Have a positive attitude.
     - Take initiative on starting new projects and coming up with new ideas that can benefit the company.
     - Come to work on time.
     - Follow the dress code.
     - Remain professional at all times when communicating with clients and other staff members.
     - Follow up with clients within two business days.
     - Respect each other.

2. Make sure the expectations are clear, obtainable, and allow staff to ask questions.

3. Align the expectations to the person's abilities and/or skillset

4. Get agreement and commitment

Staff Expectations

FOLLOW UP WITH STAFF REGULARLY.

COMMUNICATION IS CRITICAL FOR EXPECTATIONS TO MET AND/OR FULFILLED.

NOT FOLLOWING UP CAN CREATE CONFUSION, DELAYS IN THE PROCESS, AND LOW STAFF MORALE.

Managing Expectations - Leadership

Managing Expectations - Influencer

- Communication flowing up the chain of command provides management valuable information about the state of your department
  - Feedback, reports, student information, suggestions and work needs all flow from subordinate to manager.

- Your communication style has the ability to influence decisions that are made for the department and institution.

Managing Expectations - Leadership

1. Proactive Perspective/Support
   - Be proactive to *anticipate* and *respond* to the needs of your leadership.
   - Ask the right kinds of **probing questions** to determine and clarify the challenges they face in your area of expertise.
   - Add value as a soundboard, put forward timely, innovative ideas, and schedule regular times for them to brief you regarding their priorities, obstacles, and strategies.
   - Offer them an unbiased perspective while keeping the success of the team, institution, and your boss in mind.

Managing Expectations - Leadership

2. Adapt Your Language Skills.
   - When communicating upward to influence someone in a higher position, be flexible and strategic in your speaking.

   - Those in senior level positions see things from a higher level, more global. Give them that kind of panoramic perspective.

   - **<u>Succinctly</u>** land your key points, giving your content the right context that paints a clear picture of why it's good for them...not you.

Managing Expectations - Leadership

3. Reframe "No" in a Positive Way

- At times, you may need to disagree with your boss or member of senior leadership.

- Instead of saying, *"No I don't believe that approach is going to work."*
    - Reframe your language and swing it around into a more positive approach by not using the negative word "no."

- Rephrase to say, *"There is another way I believe would work even better. Would you like to hear it?"*
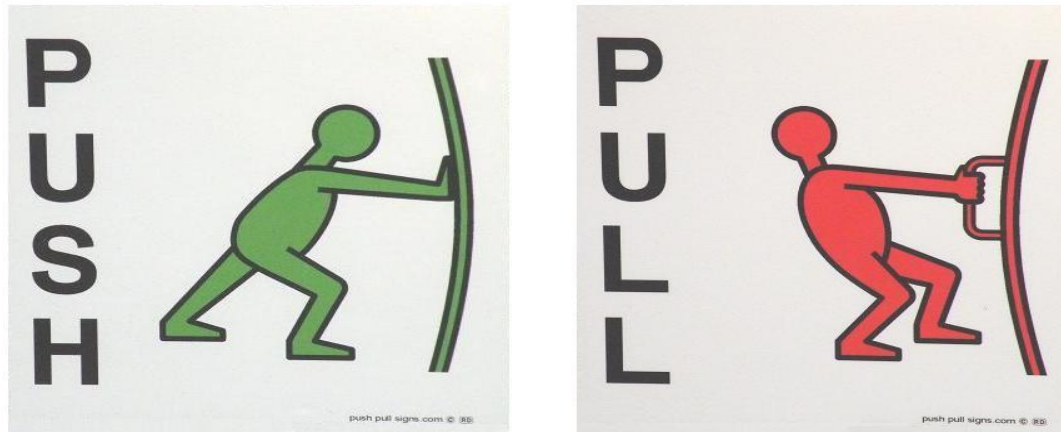
Managing Expectations - Leadership

4. Peer-to-Peer Power Language

- Go in with the mindset that you are "the expert" and communicate in their particular language.

- Take mental notes about the way they phrase things and what key words they often use. Incorporate those into your own conversational glossary.

- That makes them respond more easily and openly to your suggestions…because in a way it sounds like they are coming from them, in their style and voice.

- When you start to see yourself as adding value as a peer and trusted confidential partner, that changes the whole dynamic. You're there to help them improve their results through your insights, vision, and expertise.

Managing Expectations

- Managing expectations is a collaboration

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- Managing expectations is not about controlling the person; it is about setting you, the office, and the customer up for a successful partnership.

Resources

- Managing Expectations: Working with People Who Want More, Better, Faster, Sooner, NOW!
  - Naomi Karten

- Hawthorn Consulting Group: 4 Secrets Every Leader Needs to Influence their Boss When Communicating Up
  - Sarah Hathorn

- Business News Daily: Setting Clear Expectations
  - Skye Schooley

Business Partners

Questions?