



MARKETING YOURSELF

BY STACY WEST CLARK

The Golden Rule of Keeping Clients: Do Unto Them as You Would Have Your Doctor Do Unto You!

I know, I know. It is a strange title, but I will explain. A year or so ago my daughter was sick at 8 a.m. in the morning, so I called the doctor to get an appointment for her to be seen. I explained my child's symptoms to the receptionist, who then told me she could not give me an appointment and that a nurse would have to call me back. I asked to speak to the doctor, to which she answered "You have to speak to the nurse first."

So, with my sick child waiting in limbo, I waited three hours for the nurse to call me back. When she finally called, she asked what my child's symptoms were so she could assess the need for a visit. She decided that a visit would be proper, but she had to first put me on hold to see what appointments were still available with a doctor. Ten minutes later, she told me that no doctors were free that day but I could see a physician's assistant at 4:30p.m. — which I did — who finally prescribed the medication I had waited to get all day.

How about this for top-notch service? After this experience, did I change pediatricians? YOU BET. Did I reach out to the doctor and tell her why I left her practice — because of the awful service I had received? No, I did not. I just changed pediatricians.

This story holds a lot of truth for lawyers in

CLIENT SERVICE CHECKLIST

- Give the matter your all.
- Return phone calls the same day (preferably within 6 hours).
- Keep the client informed about every piece of paper you file.
- Work with your secretary to be a team to the client.
- Visit the client's offices for free and get to know their staff.
- Seek your client's opinions and make them part of the team.
- Learn everything you can about the client's business and "world."
- Personalize the engagement: Remember their hobbies and kids' birthdays, write hand written notes, and send articles of interest.
- Never talk to a client or leave a voicemail using your speaker phone.
- Make the client feel like they are your only client.
- Ask how they want communications (frequency/medium).
- Communicate without legalese.
- Inform client about bill, staffing, new expenses (no surprises).
- Try to send your clients business and use their products.
- Get regular feedback from the client on the representation.
- Follow-up on their comments.
- Thank them for the privilege of representing them.

today's highly competitive environment.

With over 1 million lawyers in the United States today, clients have choices, and they will choose— time and time again — the lawyer or law firm that gives them the best service.

As consultant Joel Rose recently emphasized at a meeting of the Delaware Valley Law

Firm Marketing Group, quality legal work does not equal quality service.

CLIENTS ARE UNHAPPY

In an article that appeared in the *ABA Journal* in September 2006 titled "In-house Counsel Axing Law Firms," GCs reported being unhappy with their outside law firms for

the following reasons: the firms were not in touch with their “changing needs;” they did not do a good job of “articulating the kind of value they were delivering;” and they did not “communicate well” with them about their matters.

Rather than formally “fire” these law firms, the Fortune 1,000 GCs surveyed reported they gave them no notice about their dissatisfaction — and just reduced the number of assignments they sent them.

According to Michael Rynowecer of BTI Consulting, who conducted the survey, “The results show customer service in a corporate client relationship is paramount and it is not just about returning calls. The major components of client satisfaction are the ability to make legal expertise client specific, to understand the client’s business, to go beyond what is anticipated and to achieve the client’s goals.”

Why is delivering great service so important? There are lots of potential clients out there, right? Maybe — but they are a lot harder to reel in than you think. It is a tried and true fact that it is three to five times more expensive and time-consuming to get a new client as it is to get more work from an existing client.

And another truism — great service is never forgotten. However, tales of bad service are shouted from the rafters and re-told and re-told by unhappy clients and customers left and right.

So, let’s focus on what you should do.

OUTSTANDING SERVICE

Here is my short list of what constitutes outstanding service:

- Fantabulous legal work.
- Responsiveness (Always return phone calls in the same day).
- Accessibility (in the age of BlackBerries, e-mail, voicemail and more, your secretary, colleagues and clients should always be able to find you).
- Understanding the client’s business.
- Understanding the client’s world (his family, politics in the workplace, his background).
- Making every client feel like your only client.
- Communicating with the client on every aspect of the representation.

Great client service starts at the inception of the relationship. Start out every engagement doing the following:

Ask your client the following questions:

- What would you like to be copied on? All pleadings, memorandums and depositions? All closing documents etc.?
- What kind of detail do you want on the bills? Do you want weekly, monthly or quarterly bills?
- When I need to reach you, would you prefer me to contact you via the phone, e-mail or U.S.P.S. mail?
- Would you like the names and numbers of each member of your team here at our firm, along with their e-mail and home phone num-

bers? (You might want to provide these anyway).

- When would you like to meet to discuss our strategy/approach to the case?
- What are key industry publications and trade groups I could read/join to stay current with your business and its challenges?

After you ask these questions, explain how you will staff the matter; how you can be reached in emergencies; any anticipated cost and expenses; ways in which you will strive to keep costs down and achieve the desired results; and any key deadlines.

Remember to always stress the importance of the client’s satisfaction to you.

The next step – making introductions. Introduce: (1) your secretary to the client; (2) the client to his or her team — namely all of the lawyers, paralegals and other staff members who will work hard to help the client; and (3) yourself to the client’s staff. Visit their offices, tour the facilities and meet their key people, and do it all for free.

Once the matter has started, keep the checklist handy and insure you always deliver the very best client service.

Overall, great service boils down to treating the client exactly how you would like to be treated if you were the client and the matter meant everything to you. Don’t put yourself in the position of my former pediatrician. Be on top of how you and your staff provide outstanding service — always. •