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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2015

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 161, No. 58

8 ways to keep your clients happy

PARADIGM SHIFT

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Driving client satisfaction is more of an art than a science. The idea is simple — we all should do what we need to do to keep our clients satisfied.

Nevertheless, we have all learned this can be much more difficult than it seems. What makes one client happy can drive another crazy, and while a particular working style may be ideal for some, it is completely unacceptable to others.

As with most things, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to keeping clients happy. It involves carefully weighing myriad factors and striking a delicate balance across various priorities. By doing so, we more effectively nurture and grow our client relationships to help ensure they endure over the long run.

The following are just a few of the many important considerations in keeping clients happy.

1. Know your client and understand the client's business.

We hear this all the time. Nevertheless, when we read client satisfaction surveys and the top 10 lists of general counsel pet peeves, this is a major issue time and again.

Empathy plays an important part in effectively leading client relationships and understanding how clients rate our performance. Clients are people too, and we must always put ourselves in their shoes when doing their work. We must also keep up with current events in their businesses and in their sectors.

2. Deliver great client service.

While also self-evident, this is another GC pet peeve. Great service goes hand in hand with understanding our clients and their businesses. It is incumbent upon us to gather the clues we are given when discussing projects and discerning the business context in which they arise. The more effective we are at leveraging this information, the better we are at consistently delivering what our clients want and need.

3. Know your client's pressure points.

We all have them — those things in life that drive us crazy. Whether it is litigation, an important transaction or a run-of-the-mill project, we must figure out what our clients' pressure points are so we know how to effectively navigate the land mines of a particular situation and so we can better serve as effective advocates and trusted advisers.

4. Don't be tone deaf.

Effective communication skills are essential in every client relationship. This means knowing when to talk and — even more important — when to listen.

It also means truly hearing what is being expressed, even when nothing is being said at all. Some clients are very outgoing and communicative, while others are more quiet and reserved. Whatever the case may be, we need to adapt to our clients' communication styles and recognize that they can vary widely from one person to the next. This enables us to react appropriately in any given situation.

5. Don't be a used car salesman.

All clients understand that outside counsel are required to sell their services to be successful. Much of this effort is directed to existing clients. Indeed, studies in business development strategies have shown that there is a much higher likelihood of driving additional work from existing clients rather than creating new relationships from scratch.

Being effective in sales requires a certain amount of gravitas and finesse as well as knowing when to put the pedal to the metal and when to ease up. Clients expect outside counsel to be realistic and to discern the right time and place to make a sales call and the right services to pitch. Under no circumstances should we be selling them the wrong make or model. It will annoy the client and diminish our credibility.

6. Be confident but not arrogant.

Clients hire outside counsel to accomplish those things that they cannot do on their own. A critical component of a client's hiring decision is whether the attorney under consideration inspires and projects confidence.

This is particularly important with high-stakes projects where we are being asked to do the impossible or when millions of dollars are on the line.

At times like these, being meek or insecure will not serve us. But we also need to know when humility and a softer approach are in order. Being able to dial the confidence meter up or down depending on the circumstances is an integral part of successful relationship management.

7. Be proactive.

Another pet peeve among GCs is the outside counsel who is too reactive. Clients rely on us to clearly and carefully map the ways in which a particular issue can play out and promptly prepare them for the good, the bad and the ugly.

We must regularly draw from our professional experiences and leverage them to maximize our value proposition for clients in a proactive way. We also should tap our intuition for our clients' benefit. If we have misgivings about something, we have to figure out why that is and timely advise our clients accordingly.

8. Know your strengths and weaknesses.

No matter how great we may be at certain things, we simply cannot be good at everything, and we can always improve various aspects of ourselves and our performance. Being aware of our strengths and weaknesses enables us to figure out our sweet spots and where we need someone else's assistance to navigate through certain situations and circumstances.

Ultimately, we will increase the likelihood of success for our clients and will improve our organizations' top-line revenue by making sure we have the right horses in the race in the first place.