

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

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## Tips explore how to maximize effectiveness with clients

This is part two of a two-part series.

Exceptional client service is a fundamental component of successful business. This is particularly true in highly competitive industries such as the legal profession, where the quality of the client service is often the only meaningful way to differentiate law firms and legal departments. There are many facets to effective client service, the most basic of which is being a technically excellent lawyer in a particular practice area. However, there are numerous other skills which are equally as important as substantive legal skills. Indeed, emotional intelligence is a key part of maximizing a client's overall satisfaction during its representation by counsel.

Last month, Part One of this two-part series explored the impact emotional intelligence has on client service. Now, in Part Two, we explore various tips for maximizing effectiveness with clients.

The following tips will help maximize your effectiveness with clients, thereby deepening your relationships with them and facilitating your development of new client relationships.

### Honor your word

First and foremost, clients will evaluate you and your services based on what you actually do on their behalf, not on what you intend to do or say you will do. Ultimately, clients will judge you based on how well your actions align with the expectations you have created in their minds, especially when their management is holding them accountable for your performance. There is nothing worse than overpromising and underdelivering.

### Be responsive

Clients both appreciate and expect their attorneys to respond to them, even during evenings, weekends and vacations, and while traveling. They also expect

timely follow-up once their immediate needs have been addressed. Business happens 24/7, 365 days a year and attorneys need to be just as responsive as their clients are required to be. You can be a terrific lawyer, but if you are not there when your clients need you, you may as well be just mediocre.

### Listen to your clients

Listening is a critical skill, particularly when getting assignments and receiving feedback from clients. You need to be able to hear and process what they are saying, recalibrate your approach to the extent necessary and go back to your client promptly to communicate solutions. Even in challenging situations, you can strengthen your relationship if you are thoughtful and strategic in how you react and communicate with your clients.

### Go the extra mile

You must be generous with your time and genuine in your willingness to help your clients, even if you do not reap immediate rewards. Successful business is all about relationships which are cultivated and deepened over time and through connecting with others in a meaningful way.

### Build a strong team

You can't do it all alone; you need to hire and mentor your team to understand, appreciate and develop strong client service. You are only as good as your team and teams are more effective when everyone cooperates, participates, collaborates and brings others along.

### Build on your strengths

It is always important to be open to feedback, both positive and negative and to continue to learn and grow through professional and life experiences. It is also just as critical to celebrate your strengths and to determine effective ways to leverage those talents as much as possible, rather than focusing on remedying your weaknesses. You cannot be everything to everybody and,

### PARADIGM SHIFT



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at a certain point, trying to do so becomes counterproductive.

### Be empathetic

Effective client service requires that you always put yourself in your clients' shoes and think about how you would feel if you were facing the issue at hand, both from substantive and contextual standpoints. Often, it is not just a legal problem that needs to be addressed; there is also a business context within which the issue arose which requires just as

much attention and consideration.

### Focus on the deliverable

It is always important to package your work product with care and remember that reaching the right answer is often only half the battle. Figuring out the framework within which to deliver the advice can make all the difference in whether the client will deem your performance a success. Is your client looking for a bottom-line, "no frills" answer or do they need something more formal and elaborate? Who at the client organization is the ultimate audience for your advice, what kind of relationship do they have with your client contact and where do those individuals fit within the context of both the issue at hand and the organization as a whole?

### Stay positive and be authentic

Clients can tell when you are being open, honest, authentic and trustworthy and they are much more likely to respond in a loyal way. If you are pretending to be someone you are not and do not genuinely care and put your clients first, it is obvious, and clients respond accordingly. Being positive and upbeat is just as important, showing that you love what you do will make you more attractive to both existing and potential clients.

### It's about more than just being a good lawyer

Client service excellence is about so much more than just great technical abilities; it is just as much about having and exhibiting emotional intelligence, which is priceless to clients. There is no other way to cultivate successful client relationships than to inspire trust and the most effective way to do so is to build a meaningful foundation by exhibiting all of the EQ qualities discussed above, and then some. As professional services expert David Maister so aptly stated, "Ultimately, hiring a (lawyer) is about confidence and trust. It is an emotional act."

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