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## Emotional intelligence may impact a lawyer's client service

Part one of a two-part series

**E**xceptional 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 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.

Part One of this two-part series explores the impact emotional intelligence has on client service. Part Two will explore various tips for maximizing effectiveness with clients.

There are several elements of every client service experience and emotional intelligence skills are a critical part, including empathy, effective communication and listening skills, optimism and a proficiency at inspiring confidence and trust. The moment a client seeks advice regarding a new matter and the staffing process begins, it is prudent to include a team member who has experience with, and institutional knowledge of, the client (e.g., relationship partner), since they can offer invaluable insight and guidance. They can also help frame the relevant issues in a way that draws upon past experiences with the client, their working style, their likes and dislikes, their strengths and challenges and their victories and defeats. Indeed, this is a unique value add that other team members may simply not be in a position to provide and which makes a world of difference when

measuring the team's overall performance and effectiveness. To the extent that the matter is an engagement with a new client, it is important to determine who on the team has had experience, which is particularly relevant to the new client's business and legal needs and will help drive the initial discussions.

From the moment that these discussions begin, attorneys should be evaluating not only what their client is telling them about the issue, but should also consider the position of the person who is their client contact, both with respect to the matter at hand as well as within the context of the corporation or business unit in which he or she works. It is also important to determine who else at the client's business may be affected by the issue and whether it is necessary to involve them in the decision-making process. Budget and timing considerations should also be openly discussed and a preliminary plan developed so that there is consensus from the beginning and a framework within which to have continuing conversations regarding these parameters, particularly in the event adjustments are needed.

As the matter intake process progresses, lawyers need to determine not only how they are going to substantively address the legal issues at hand, but also how to package the results in a way that is most meaningful and helpful to the client. This requires a delicate balance between technical skills and emotional intelligence. Attorneys should confirm that they have the required expertise and knowledge from both the legal and business perspectives and determine whether they need to include additional resources on the client service team, particularly as the discussions regarding the matter continue to unfold (which can sometimes happen over days, if not weeks). At this juncture, lawyers

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must be self-aware enough to recognize when bringing others into a matter may better serve the client than trying to do the work oneself, even if the project is within one's general practice area. Ultimately, doing what is best for the client, both in terms of quality and value, preserves and strengthens a client relationship, not doing work yourself that is better done by someone else just because of your fear or insecurity about introduc-

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ing other people to your client.

Once the client team is formed, the project leader must properly communicate the project's scope to the team and clearly define each member's role, conduct the necessary risk assessments and effectively manage the project from all relevant angles. At this juncture, it is critically important to assess the exact nature of the requested deliverables, beyond just the legal advice itself. Indeed, sometimes a client is seeking moral support or personal advice with respect to the issue at hand and the high EQ, or emotional intelligence, lawyer will sense this is the case and effectively serve as the trusted adviser that the client needs.

As the project winds down and attorneys prepare to advise their clients, it is always prudent to take a step back and assess the team's performance and to consider the optimal manner in which to deliver the advice. Every client and situation is unique, thereby requiring a carefully tailored approach each time. Ultimately, one must consider the impact the advice will have on various constituents within the organization, whether additional decision-makers or stakeholders need to be informed and whether the results will require further research and evaluation. Even if the project has reached its natural conclusion, high EQ dictates that attorneys follow up with their clients and seek feedback to ensure the client has everything he or she needs.

Exceptional client service is not just a luxury anymore — it is everyone's expectation and its presence (or absence) is easy for all clients to see, both large and small, sophisticated and unsophisticated.

In the next installment of this two-part series, we will explore various tips that will help maximize an attorney's ability to deliver highly effective legal services richly textured with emotional intelligence.