5 Tips For Providing Value and Keeping Clients

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The key ingredient to any law firm's success is how it serves its clientele. But what exactly do clients want? Through those countless conversations, we've uncovered five recurring themes that get to the heart of what clients really want and expect from their legal counsel.

1. Listen and learn

Many lawyers can talk a good talk and argue a great case before the court, but none of that can be reached without first listening to and understanding the client's situation, needs, and expectations. Clients want to feel assured that you have done everything possible to listen to their concerns, be fully informed of the circumstances surrounding their case, and have a clear picture of their desired outcome.

They are coming to you with a serious matter, and they are very likely to be under considerable stress or facing a life altering dilemma. Ask questions, probe the matter, take good notes, and do whatever it takes to uncover all you can so you can forge a truly trusting relationship. If you don't make the effort to listen and learn, they're not going to feel confident in your ability to represent them. That lost confidence equates to lost business down the road.

2. Be organized

Clients expect their lawyers to be conversant with the law, but they also want them to be organized. Sloppy case management won't make up for superb lawyering. That means always knowing where a file stands, where it is, keeping documents in order, and making sure every task and critical date is tracked and calendared. Managing time and calendars aren't just good for client relations, it is vital when staying in practice.

According to the ABA, calendar-related errors are the leading cause of malpractice actions against lawyers, accounting for more than a full third of all malpractice claims. Missed deadlines, filing dates, and court appearances attributed either to procrastination, failure to maintain an up-to-date calendar, or user error when adding calendar entries can be enormously costly for the client relationship, and to the law firm. An organized practice and an up-to-date calendar are the hallmarks of success in every aspect.

3. Communicate clearly and be responsive

Good communications aren't just a rule of professional conduct, it's a rule of exceptional client service. Yet it is frequently an area that clients complain about, concerning their relationships with lawyers. Technology has changed the way people communicate and their expectations for responses, but it has also provided better avenues for meeting those needs. Clients want their lawyers to provide an effective method for communicating, sharing documents and information, and keeping them abreast of developments in the case.

Of course, you don't always have the time to phone or hunt down clients, and it becomes even more challenging when there are time or distance considerations. Many lawyers have found a convenient and effective way of bridging that problem: a client portal. Using the web, a client portal provides both the client and lawyer with a secure method to access and share documents and information.

Upload a document, send them a notification, and they can log in and get everything they need. It's also much safer and more confidential than sending an email. In the modern age, your clients expect their case to be accessible and you to be responsive. A portal lets you stay in touch with them wherever and whenever.

4. Let clients get involved

You know the law, but your clients know their own situation best. Whether you care to acknowledge it or not, your client is your best partner. After all, they are footing the bill (but more on that below). Today's clients aren't just content with dumping a file on their lawyer and then waiting for a court date or a final result.

They want to be involved in the decisions surrounding the case. Keep them informed of critical dates and case details and they'll be much more likely to be satisfied with the process and your skills. The result of the matter may not always be what they were hoping for, but if they are actively involved, they'll feel much better about it and value the services provided.

5. Provide clear bills

In order to establish value for legal clients, it's time to talk money. Every client engagement may begin with service, but they end with a bill. Whether it is by the hour, a flat fee, or on contingency, clients want to ensure they are getting the most value for their dollar. That means having clarity in billing with every line item and charge fully justified and explained.

Time tracking and billing technologies enable you to do that. Not only that, they also allow you to send bills and receive payments much more quickly. A client is less likely to challenge your bill if they know what every item is and the details of every charge. And they'll be much more receptive to paying on time (or sooner) when they receive a clear, detailed, and expedient bill.

Making these five areas the pillars of your client service will go a long way towards establishing the value your clients seek.

Clio can help you achieve everything mentioned above. Want to see it in action? Try Clio for free today.

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