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LEGAL MARKETING

What Clients Want From Lawyers: A Blueprint for Your Practice

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Special to the Legal

I have been a law firm marketing consultant for over 20 years and during that time I have spoken to hundreds of your clients. I know what they want. Plain and simple, if you want to grow your practice, follow this blueprint.

STACY WEST CLARK *has been helping lawyers and law firms grow their practices and revenues for over 25 years. She is a former attorney with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius and was its first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC, which can be found at www.stacyclarkmarketing.com.*

Clients want their lawyers (you):

• To provide outstanding work product—done on time and under budget. The motto "underpromise and overdeliver" is the one to follow.

• To be a pleasure to work with—always.

• To have a solicitous, helpful, friendly staff and back office. To ensure this, first, hire great customer service-oriented people and second, make sure every interaction (phone, email or in-person) a client has with your staff is a positive one. Train your staff. Make an effort to personally introduce your team (lawyers, staff and the receptionist) to your client. When the client comes to the office, make sure your receptionist knows his or her name so the receptionist can personally greet him or her.

• To find a way to say yes, if possible.

• To look the part. Your dress, handshake and overall appearance should silently communicate that you are smart, at the top of your game and have respect for yourself and the profession.

• To be a class act. It matters how you dress, carry yourself, treat others in public and treat your staff. Avoid being critical of others.

• To make them feel like their matter is the only matter you have to work on and you are thinking hard about the best way to help them.

• To be incredibly knowledgeable about, and a cheerleader for, your firm, your practice area, their business and industry. Do you read your firm's website and press releases? Are you aware of recent victories your colleagues have had? Do you have a Google alert set up on all your clients? Do you regularly check their website and LinkedIn pages for news about them? Are you a member of their industry's trade group and/or have you asked to go to meetings? Do you read what they read? Do you congratulate your client on any successes and try to use his or her services when you can? All of this is important.

• To be credentialed. Get active in your practice field. Write, speak and lead. Get to know reporters who could use your background or on-the-record advice. When you do any of these things, make sure your bio reflects it.

• To be knowledgeable about news in your county and beyond. Do you read local or industry daily papers? The Philadelphia Business Journal has a wonderful digest each day about companies in the news that is extremely helpful and fast to read.

• To be client-centered. This means to be incredibly knowledgeable—on your dime—about the client's business or personal/family situation. How does the client make money? Who is the competition? What are regulatory or industry challenges they face? It also means to understand the client's preferences for communication and more. I suggest having a "first meeting client protocol" where you specifically go over expectations and needs of the client in the following areas:

• **Responsiveness.** How will they define it?

• **Communication.** Do they prefer to be contacted by phone, U.S. postal or email?

• **Status reports.** Do they want to see all paper communications about the case? How often would they like updates?

• **Emergencies.** How best to reach you or your team in the event of one?

• **Staff/team introductions.** Make them.

• **Strategy.** Do they want to be part of the case strategy discussions?

• **Success.** How will they judge it?

• **Billing procedures.** Explain them. What will they/won't they be charged for?

• **Technology.** Is there an intranet for them to see case status?

• To have helpful invoices. Your invoices are extremely closely read and can be a hugely important marketing tool. Make sure they are not a source of irritation ("Review of file 0.1; copy documents $1") and show the value the client received ("prepared, argued and won summary judgment ending litigation").

• To not land surprises on them—whether for document production, a huge and unexpected invoice or a court date.

• To provide value-added services—meaning things that do not show up on the bill that enrich their personal or professional life. For example, will you sit in on board meetings or annual shareholder meetings for free? Will you provide on-site training on key legal developments or hold "office hours" at the company to explain and answer questions about a new law or regulation? For individual consumer clients, will you make introductions for them to beneficial service providers like financial planners, brokers, agents and more? Will you check in with them off the clock, from time to time to see how they are?

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• To ask for feedback when the matter is over about anything you or your staff could have done better. Their opinion matters and such a conversation will almost always lead to new work and further cement your relationship. Once given feedback, act upon it and let the client know you have done so. (Ask your staff for feedback and their ideas for how to improve your services as well.)

• To have a great network of professionals you refer to and can pass on to them. Seek out and formalize relationships with other lawyers in practice areas that do not conflict with yours or your firm's. In addition, create a network for yourself of professionals who are at the top of their game—agents, brokers, analysts, bankers and more. In this way, you will be a terrific resource for your client and have a richly rewarding referral circle.

There is no magic or secret to the foregoing. Give as much as you can to your clients, staff, referral sources and others and you will grow a substantial practice. I am rooting for you. •