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LEGAL MARKETING

Is Your Receptionist Hurting or Helping Your Marketing Efforts?

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Special to The Legal

Have you ever walked into a business and been warmly greeted by the receptionist? It is a very soothing and welcoming feeling. You enjoy being treated well and have a positive impression not just of the business you have entered—but about what is next to occur inside its walls.

Conversely, have you ever walked into a business and the receptionist appears uninterested, uncaring, bothered by your presence and even arrogant? If you are like me, you really remember the negative encounters and wonder if they translate into poor service and attitude on the part of all with the lawyers and staff of the firm.

Whoever you select to “man” your receptionist station (and answer your main phone number) must understand how critical their role is in setting the tone for any interaction with your law firm. They can help you or really hurt you and the vibe you are trying to put out for your practice. According to the Harvard Business Review, at some



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companies today, receptionists are given the actual title of “directors of first impressions”—seemingly recognizing how critical their role is to the firm.

There are many examples of great receptionists in the Delaware Valley. They learn clients’ names, greet them warmly with huge smiles, take their coats and offer them a drink or other comforts. The clients at these firms are usually upset when they come in and the receptionist is not there—so much have they come to rely and enjoy the warm welcome. Examples include the receptionists at such notable area firms as Hamburg Rubin Mullin Maxwell & Lupin, Klasko Immigration Law Partners, Morgan,

Lewis & Bockius, Reed Smith, MacElree Harvey, Wisler Pearlstine, Conrad O’Brien and Kaplin Stewart Meloff Reiter & Stein.

Unfortunately, there are many firms who have not hired similar “rays of light” and ambassadors of first impressions. I was visiting a Lehigh Valley firm for the first time last month and the receptionist did not look up when I came in, sneered at me when he did look up, got my name wrong twice and appeared to thoroughly hate his job. I wondered instantly if his uncaring attitude was representative of the staff and attorneys at the firm. If they cared so much about providing outstanding client service, wouldn’t they have hired a smiling interested person as their official greeter.

To help you train your receptionist to successfully market your practice—as an extension of you, do the following:

- Hire a great person who is optimistic and displays a “can do” attitude and likes people. This should come out in the job interview and be put in the written job description as well.

State that it is expected that the receptionist will warmly greet each guest—even stand up, smile and shake their hand—and offer them assistance and comforts. Each and every guest—even opposing counsel—should be treated professionally, warmly and confidently. Teach the receptionist to shake hands firmly and with eye contact.

- Make sure the receptionist knows that part of his job is to be a positive and professional problem solver. Each visitor or caller has a problem and the receptionist can be the first line of help.

- Have the receptionist dress properly. It is important that he or she “dress up” and look like a professional to represent your firm. This should include a proper blouse or button-down shirt, sweater or blazer and appropriate slacks/skirts. Hair should also be nicely attended to as well.

- Have your lawyers/staff advise the receptionist who is coming in each day so that he or she can offer personalized greetings to visitors.

- Train the receptionist on how to handle a variety of questions and scenarios including parking, transportation (as well as ADA issues) and what specific lawyers/the firm does.

- The receptionist should be able to easily get hot or cold beverages in proper cups to the visitor and take their coats. He should also have a variety of helpful aids nearby such as office supplies, spot removers and hygienic items.

- If the receptionist is also the switchboard operator, he should be asked to smile when on the phone, avoid using slang, be incredibly attuned to the proper pronunciation of the caller’s name and get the caller to someone

quickly who can help them asap—even if the desired attorney is unavailable. Callers do not want their name mangled or to be left on hold or be bounced around the office and unable to reach a human when they get the lawyer’s voicemail. They want to feel like the firm values their time and are all “in it” to help them get what they need.

- In most firms, the receptionist can be juggling an incoming phone call and greeting guests at the same time.

Whoever you select to ‘man’ your receptionist station (and answer your main phone number) must understand how critical their role is in setting the tone for any interaction with your law firm.

Indeed, this is a balancing act but should be handled with grace, politeness and caring to all parties involved.

- The receptionist should refrain from doing any internet shopping, checking personal email and social media sites, playing games at his desk or taking personal calls which may interfere with the tasks at hand.

Anyone who fills in for the receptionist at lunch or breaks should be trained to observe these rules as well.

Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young will be implementing a model program later this year that everyone in the legal community should take note of now. It is being tentatively called “Concierge Reception.” Once their main reception space has been newly renovated,

the receptionist’s role will be akin to a welcome greeter or “hotel” concierge. He will be able to print boarding passes, arrange for restaurant reservations and transportation and provide computers, Wi-Fi or any other business needs, among many other things. The idea is to make every visitor to Stradley Ronon feel the love and incredible professionalism of the firm from the moment they arrive! Remember this kind of “entryway” experience will positively market the strength and sophistication of the firm right from the start.

Janet Roedell, Stradley Ronon’s director of operations, said, “With our new reception and conferencing space, our desire is to provide clients and visitors with a greater sense of the ultimate guest experience. This includes providing our hospitality staff with the tools and training needed to allow them to easily deliver these services, to discern where we can meet a need, and to make emotional connections with our guests at every touch point during any interaction. Our “white-glove” service delivery would be akin to what they would typically receive at a five-star hotel, with the hope that every client and visitor who walks through our doors feels special and knows how much we value our relationships.”

I applaud this effort. Now it is your turn to create incredible client experiences. I am rooting for you. •