

Are you practicing good client relations?

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

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So you think you know your clients? Do you know the names of their family members? Do you know what your clients are passionate about outside of their careers? Have you ever been onsite to take a tour of their operation, factory, office, or warehouse?

Have you done a follow-up meeting after you have finished a file for them? Have you asked them directly how you might improve your service to them? Do you know why your clients chose you and continue to have you serve them? Do you know what value your clients place on your services? (This would be very valuable information in helping you to develop your business plan as it will give you insight from the client perspective as to what sets you apart from your competition.)

All of these questions, and there are many more, you should know the answers to, and if you do not, you are not doing enough to cultivate the relationships that you currently have with your clients and could be missing out on further opportunities to serve them.

When I am working with a new client, the first thing I look at is their current clients. You won't be able to ask for referrals or more business if you don't have a great relationship with them. Great relationships take time and effort, but the payback far outweighs the investment. You have heard it before and you will hear it again: it is far easier to obtain more business from a current client than it is to find new business. So make sure your current clients are happy.

The No. 1 contributing factor to the success of your practice will be the relationships you build. Aside from your expertise and the way you provide your services, it is all about how you treat people. As a service provider, the relationship you create with your clients often will have more to do with you and them than it will the actual legal matter. They

will automatically expect you to be good at practicing law – that is a given. It's all about how you treat your clients and prospects.

One litigator recently told me “my clients don't need to like me; they want me to be a pit bull for them”. I disagree emphatically. While they may want the “pit bull” in the court room or during a discovery, they most certainly would prefer to like you in their dealings with you. They are going through something that is already unpleasant; the last thing they need is to have a hard to handle lawyer to deal with. They don't want to be taken for granted or talked down to. And in most cases when they are reporting to a superior, part of your job is to make them look good.

One key thing is creating buy-in. Include your clients in the process. Ask for their feedback. Don't treat them like children who know nothing about the law. They know enough to have retained you.



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Some key steps in providing excellent clients relations:

- Find an activity of mutual interest and invite your clients to attend with you.
- Take a tour of their operation and get to meet some of their “key” people.
- Continually follow up with them.
- Conduct a post-mortem after every file is completed, review the process and find out how you may have better served this client.
- Invite them to events where you are speaking.
- Send them birthday and anniversary cards – perhaps on the anniversary of a file you completed successfully for them. (Remind them of your value to them)
- The next time your clients visit your office introduce them to your managing partner. Brief your partner on this client so she will have a handle on what you are doing and the nature of the file.
- Depending on the nature of your client’s business, think about your network and who might be able to offer your clients more business or contacts.

None of these tactics take that much time; however this added attention you are providing to your clients will ensure you always have a handle on what they are thinking. All of these steps will ensure that you will be able to build a solid enough relationship that will allow you to ask for referrals or more business

In fact, you might not even have to ask for the referrals or business. B

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