

Business & Careers

Standout service makes a firm stand out



Gary Mitchell
The Coach

Be honest: is your firm doing everything it can to better serve your clients? Are your lawyers taking the time to really get to know and understand the needs of your clients and the big picture view?

Before you go out and spend money on your marketing initiatives, ensure you are helping your lawyers better serve your clients, building valuable business partnerships, and truly understanding the needs and challenges, ensuring better alignment and increased value.

The legal landscape is highly competitive, more than it has ever been in the past. You need to do whatever you can do to stand out and set your firm and your lawyers apart from your competition. Service is the first place to start.

Tips to get you started

Help your lawyers understand how and when to ask the right questions to better know your clients, and their business, mission statement and strategic plan. Ensure your lawyers become a part of your clients' business decisions and use their legal training in the business environment (if necessary, enhance their business skills). Train your lawyers in project management so they can manage workload, keep track of files, compliance, cost control, work-

ing with external counsel and managing the team serving the client. Reality minus expectations equals customer experience.

Help your lawyers go through the exercise of creating a business plan for their practice so they can gain better sector knowledge of their target markets. Depending on practice area, they might include business, not for profit, MUSH (municipalities, universities, schools, hospitals), and all levels of government.

This exercise will also open their eyes to fully understand the role of in-house counsel, such as cheaper risk management, role in senior management, compliance, cost control, and so on.

Why do clients come and why do clients go? If you don't know the answer to that question, you'd better figure it out. You and your lawyers also need to better understand that different

clients — women, men, young, senior, solo, in-house practitioner, startup, etc. — have different needs.

Some other things to consider

How do you deal with the difficult client? The use of feedback and survey forms are important. Learn to use these effectively. Set up file evaluation from the beginning so your clients feel open and free to offer you feedback as the file progresses. They will offer criticism and you need to learn how to deal with poor results. Conduct a self-assessment. When your clients feel open to providing you with feedback, it gives you a better opportunity to "fix" small issues before they become large.

Taking the time (yes, time; it's an investment), to better the working relationships and man-

age client expectations including working with the support staff of your client. Teach your lawyers how to get better at work handling and work flow, including delegating, staff continuity and handling turnover, and how to manage large and complex projects, litigation and measuring return on investment on litigation.

Consider how your firm and your lawyers leverage the use of technology by way of intranets, extranets, shared documentation and databases, electronic communication, e-billing and payment, document exchange, process improvements and online reporting.

Working with the client

It all starts with communication. That means regular communication. **Communication, Page 22**



LABOUR LAWYER (IN-HOUSE COUNSEL)

The University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA) is seeking a **Labour Lawyer (in-house Counsel)**. UTFA is the official representative of the faculty and librarians at the University of Toronto in employment matters, monetary and non-monetary terms and conditions of employment, and grievances.

The successful applicant will have 3 to 5 years of labour law, labour relations, or equivalent experience, preferably in the post-secondary education sector. Primary responsibilities will include:

- (i) advising members on matters related to their employment at the University;
- (ii) representing grievors throughout the grievance process including at formal hearings;
- (iii) providing advice on tenure matters and conducting tenure appeals;
- (iv) advising committees of the Association; and
- (v) providing periodic support for collective bargaining, including in policy negotiations.

Previous experience in labour negotiations or in the union movement would be considered an asset. Superior interpersonal and communications skills (written and verbal) are required.

The Legal Counsel will work under the direction of the President of the Association, the Vice-President, Grievances, and the General Counsel on grievance-related matters, and other members of the Executive of the Association as specified by the President.

Applicants should send a cover letter and resume by December 4, 2016, to UTFA Administrative Assistant Chris Penn at faculty@utfa.org with 'Labour Lawyer Position' as the subject line. UTFA is an equal opportunity employer and we welcome applications from traditionally disadvantaged groups. We thank all candidates for their interest; however, only those selected for an interview will be contacted.



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Reporting to the General Counsel & Vice President Registration, and working in cooperation with the Western and Quebec Regional Directors, as well as the Director, Proficiency, you will be responsible for the delivery of consistent, fair, timely, and high quality registration-related services to IIROC's Dealer Members.

An excellent communicator with exceptional people management skills, you will maintain and develop effective working relationships with stakeholders including IIROC members, provincial securities commissions and IIROC District Councils. You will also promote collaboration and teamwork within the Registration department and across IIROC, particularly with IIROC's regional offices.

You possess a Law degree and have at least five years of senior people management experience as well as in-depth knowledge of, and sound judgment in applying, relevant securities legislation. Investment industry experience is required and direct involvement in registration matters is an asset. Completion of the Canadian Securities, Partners Directors and Officers and/or Chief Compliance Officer courses is an asset.

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Qualified candidates should submit their resume online quoting 2016470, in confidence, through our Careers page.

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Communication: Keep in regular touch with clients

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tion, not just sending them bills. Pick up the phone every once in a while and see how they are doing. You'd be surprised what you can learn by asking the right questions.

I had a client a few years ago who told me about how one of his junior associates was on a call with a rather large firm client. While this associate only did a small amount of work for this client, he listened, asked questions and discovered a very large and impending need. When he got off the phone, he went straight to the managing partner and told him what he had learned. The managing partner then went directly over

to the client's office and walked out with very large retainer cheque.

This goes to show that you never know what you will learn about the client by taking a keen interest in them. And they will notice.

Keep track of the client's interests by offering invitations to events and entertainment. Make bill review a new habit by looking for cost reduction and value-add opportunities. Consider alternate billing including: incentives, bonuses, discounts (only for your very best clients), hybrids, milestone billing, annual fixed fees, etc.

How can you get into their "good books" by developing

your team and talent? How do you measure and reward success? Create objective metrics: cost and cost savings, efficiencies, predictability of legal fees, better projections, impact (results), accessibility and turnaround time.

Wait, there's more

How can you perfect the way your firm handles RFPs and other contests? Become aware of the warning signs before you may lose clients. Two things that are often overlooked — and are critically important to the long-term success of your firm — are file and talent succession planning.

From my experience there is nowhere near the amount of attention paid to these two areas which leaves your firm vulnerable.

Benefit for your firm

Your firm's ability to keep costs lower opens the door for more cross-serving. You can be the leader in your marketplace. Your firm gets to review benefits and learning before it goes public. Your firm gains the reputation of being "client-centric."

The ability to showcase this approach will create a marketing opportunity. This will create the opportunity to partner with your client and build better relation-

ships creating greater loyalty. This also meets the way millennials think and behave — a great HR strategy to attract and retain top talent.

Gary Mitchell is the principal at On Trac Coach where he works with lawyers, law clerks and paralegals across Canada helping them to attract more clients and grow their businesses. He is the co-founder of The Legal A Team, a marketing and management alliance focused on providing big firm support to smaller law firms and solo practice lawyers. His second book, "Raindance Two: A Blueprint for Growing your Practice," is now available. He can be reached at gary@ontraccoach.com or 604-669-5235.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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CONGRATULATIONS

Hick Morley's Carolyn Kay has been elected as a Fellow of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers — a non-profit professional association honouring leading lawyers in the practice of Labour and Employment Law. Fellows of the College are esteemed lawyers who possess at least 20 years experience and are acknowledged as distinguished members in the field of labour and employment law, who promote achievement, advancement and excellence in the practice by setting standards of professionalism and civility. Carolyn joins Hicks Morley partner and past electee, Jeffrey Goodman, as a Fellow of the College.

Find out more at hicksmorley.com

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