

Practicing Law With Confidence

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It is hard to overstate the important role that [confidence](#) plays in building a professional services practice. Clients generally have no direct way to evaluate the quality of your legal skills. Instead, prospective clients will either [get a referral](#) from someone they already trust or they will look for indirect evidence that you are trustworthy and competent.

[Body language and dress](#), for example, can do a lot to convey your competence and trustworthiness. Trust can also be built [through a series of small acts](#) over time (some having nothing to do with your professional competence).

But the way we communicate with our clients after they have engaged us also plays an important role in client satisfaction (which in turn can lead to more work or referrals). Simply put, when we exude confidence in presenting options to our clients, they are more apt to trust our judgment and therefore more likely to hire us in the future or tell others about our services.

For lawyers in private practice, it is not always easy to project this kind of confidence about our opinions. There is a natural tension between helping your clients sleep at night by advising them what to do and avoiding malpractice claims by laying out all of the options and letting the client decide. I suspect, however, that many lawyers who do this have clients who are frustrated with their lawyer.

You do want to send the CYA letter, however. Make sure that the client was advised of the risks of pursuing various options. But helping clients make decisions by being more direct is likely to result in happier clients who refer work to you. So don't be afraid to tell them what you think. Your livelihood depends on it!