

SOLICITING POWERFUL TESTIMONIALS

Most people cringe at the idea of asking for a testimonial or review. Asking someone to praise you goes against everything we have ever been taught. When I suggest to my coaching clients to request client testimonials, I usually get that 'stare into the middle distance' that tells me they are frantically cataloging all the reasons why they can't do it.

But do this they must. Testimonials are important social proof that help prospective clients select potential providers. You can find other ways to provide this proof (such as case studies, awards and other third party recommendations), but there are few tactics as powerful as the opinions of peers and former clients that have actually worked with you.

But first, a note about the use of testimonials, endorsements, awards and recommendations in your marketing materials. According to the article, 10 Tips for Avoiding Ethical Lapses When Using Social Media which appeared in Business Law Today and was posted on the American Bar Association's website, lawyers should be cautious and make sure they understand the rules of their state when it comes to the use of testimonials and recommendations. These two paragraphs sum it up well.

"Many social media platforms like LinkedIn and Avvo heavily promote the use of testimonials, endorsements, and ratings (either by peers or consumers). These features are typically designed by social media companies with one-size-fits-all functionality and little or no attention given to variations in state ethics rules. Some jurisdictions prohibit or severely restrict lawyers' use of testimonials and endorsements. They may also require testimonials and endorsements to be accompanied by specific disclaimers. [South Carolina Ethics Opinion 09-10](#), for example, provides that (1) lawyers cannot solicit or allow publication of testimonials on websites and (2) lawyers cannot solicit or allow publication of endorsements unless presented in a way that would not be misleading or likely to create unjustified expectations. The opinion also concluded that lawyers who claim their profiles on social media sites like LinkedIn and Avvo (which include functions for endorsements, testimonials, and ratings) are responsible for conforming all of the information on their profiles to the ethics rules.

Lawyers must, therefore, pay careful attention to whether their use of any endorsement, testimonial, or rating features of a social networking site is capable of complying with the ethics rules that apply in the state(s) where they are licensed. If not, then the lawyer may have no choice but to remove that content from his or her profile."

So what's the best way to go about asking for a testimonial? It's simple. Ask directly and make it easy for them to do it. If more guidance is needed, read on.

WHY DON'T PEOPLE WRITE TESTIMONIALS?

There are three main reason why people don't write testimonials: 1. They lack the time. 2. They lack the commitment or, 3. They lack the words.

Let's deal with number two first. Most people send their request to those that they believe will write a positive review of your services. But if you are sending to all of your former clients, inevitably a few will not have the same commitment to your success that you have. Maybe they are 'takers', self-indulged or were not impressed with your services. Regardless, in my experience, this is very few people. Those that were not satisfied are your source of real insight. Finding out why can help you improve your service. It's an uncomfortable conversation to have but one that will produce tremendous results for you and your business for years to come. So if you sense this is the case, follow up with a call and find out why.

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The other two reasons are time and the creative mental block of not knowing what to write. When people can't think of what to write, they put it off for later. And that often leads to the testimonial not getting written. The formula for requesting testimonials addresses both of these issues. The more you can help people with what to write and do it quickly, the more likely you will get positive testimonials.

PERSONALIZE YOUR REQUEST:

People respond better to requests for a personal favor. I would suggest sending personalized notes to each client rather than to the more generic, 'valued client' or some other mass greeting. A mass greeting is too easy to ignore. Personal notes will improve the odds that people will respond with a positive testimonial. That having been said, if you don't have the time to write personalized messages to every client, at least set up a mail merge and use the client's name in the greeting.

REMIND THEM OF POSITIVE EVENTS

If you recall a particular comment they made during your work together include that in your letter. Reminding them of positive moments makes it easier for them to transfer that experience in to a compelling testimonial. For instance,

"I recall after we filed the registration that you commented how painless the process was. I was really flattered by that because it is not always a seamless and pain-free process. Of course, it helps to have organized and thoughtful clients."

You can also suggest your own impression of your work together. For instance, you may recall how busy they were when you were working together or the challenges they had in selecting outside counsel. You can write something like this:

"I remember you were buried with a big project that must have made it difficult for you to juggle getting our work done at the same time. I hope working with me made it easier for you when we talked several times in the evening hours."

REMIND THEM THAT TESTIMONIALS HELP OTHERS

Legal services are scary services to purchase. You only see the quality of the service after you've paid for it. You can't return the hours spent, rewind time or unravel bad decisions. Testimonials act as social proof of the quality of your lawyering and service skills. Prospective clients don't want to be the guinea pig on their important legal issues. As such, people look for proof, recommendations from trusted friends and peers, awards and other proof that their decision to use you won't turn into a regret.

Remind clients that their testimonial will help others make a decision as to whether to hire you. It's not just a favor to you but their review has a higher purpose- to help others considering you to figure out whether your services are right for them. Well written testimonials help prospective clients experience what it is like to work with you. So encourage that in your request for their testimonial.

MAKE IT QUICK AND EASY

Show that you are conscientious and care about the time it takes to draft a review. Estimate the amount of time you think it will take and let them know what you are asking of them. Then structure your request to make it as easy for them as possible by including suggestions, links to websites or by offering to write it yourself. The easier you make it for them, the more likely they are to do it.

ASK QUESTIONS TO BUILD A POWERFUL TESTIMONY

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Every purchase comes with it some worry or concern, especially in professional services. It could be the cost, whether you have the experience, whether you possess the intimidation factor for the other side, or numerous other concerns. Asking about these concerns leads them to think about specific examples of what it was like to work with you. Addressing the concerns up front leads clients to hone in on specific examples where they had concerns but were pleasantly surprised. This makes the testimonial more authentic and believable.

The second question asks them to explain what actually happened. It's rare that their early fears play out. (And, if by chance they did, that's something you want to know anyway.)

ENCOURAGE AUTHENTICITY

Lastly, ask them to write it in a way that is human and authentic. Most people want to please you with a good testimonial which means they fall into their comfort zone of 'business speak'. This is a sanitized, bland, safe style of writing that works well for internal communications but sounds canned in a testimonial. You want them to write like a human being. By asking them to write the review as if they are writing to their best friend, you are giving them permission to write authentically.

Example

Seeing an example may help clarify why this formula is so much more powerful. Here's a typical recommendation:

"I attended Julie's session at HDI on Customer Experience Management. Julie was motivational and informative and made it very easy to engage throughout the session. She had great energy throughout and made great use of charts and statistics important to our industry. I would definitely recommend working with Julie or engaging her as a speaker."

Now, here's a recommendation in which an expression of the concern was solicited.

"I was initially concerned that Julie's Customer Experience Management session at the HDI conference was going to be another tired re-packaging of the same old, same old. Maybe I've been to too many of these IT conferences and seen too many sessions on Customer Experience Management. After all, techno geeks are not known for their presentation skills or their command of the audience's attention. But Julie was different. She blew my socks off! Her session not only presented new information and ideas but she was motivational and had an energy level that was contagious. If you get a chance to attend her session in the future, or better yet hire her to present it, I would definitely recommend her."

The expression of the concern enables the reader to put themselves in the same place and relate better to the situation.

THE TESTIMONIAL FORMULA

The formula for constructing powerful testimonials asks clients to identify their concern in hiring you, to then explain what they actually experienced and finally to write their review in an authentic manner. These three questions will lead them through the draft and will result in a compelling review of your services.

1. What concerns did you initially have about the legal issue you were dealing with? Similarly, what concerns did you have about working with The Gehres Law Group?
2. What did you actually experience? What happened?
3. How would you describe working with us to a close peer or best friend?

With that said, here's my version of what I think you should say in this letter.

"Hi __,

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In today's connected and increasingly impersonal world, it is harder for people to know whether the services offered to them are truly as good as promised. The problem is especially acute for small businesses. Not only must we fight to get noticed in the online world, but we also want to attract the attention of prospective client with whom we would enjoy working. I thoroughly enjoyed working with you and hope you found the services of [Law Firm] exceptional in every respect. Of course, if you didn't, I'd like to hear about that too- more, in fact.

Regardless, I'm writing to ask the favor of a positive testimonial. It should only take about 3-5 minutes of your time. And, if you prefer, I would also be happy to draft one for you. Of course, it would be better to come from you, with your experience and perspective, in your voice, written informally.

Below, I've listed [number] websites where you can add your review of my services. Hopefully you'll have the time to copy and paste your testimonial to all [number]. These help my website rank higher in search results. It also provides a sort of repository of all the reviews given of my firm. You can also find me on LinkedIn where you can record your recommendation by clicking [here](#) and scrolling down to the recommendations section. (Hyperlink to your LinkedIn Profile page). I'd like to add the best testimonials to my website so if you are OK with that, please let me know so I can add your kind remarks. As a policy, I will only list your first name unless you specify that I can use your full name.

[If you have a specific situation you recall, you can add that in here.]

To make it easier, I've included three questions that will, hopefully, help you draft your review.

1. What concerns did you initially have about the legal issue you were dealing with? Or, what concerns did you have about working with [Law Firm]?
2. What did you actually experience? What happened? How were these concerns minimized or alleviated?
3. How would you describe working with us to a close professional peer or best friend? What results or benefit would you tell them about that occurred from working with us?

I can't thank you enough for taking time to do this for me. I will, of course, reciprocate with referrals to your business or connect you with anyone you think would help in your success. We remain dedicated to providing the highest quality legal services and sincerely appreciate your past business. If you ever have a question or concern about our services, please do not hesitate to let me know and I will promptly address it.

Most sincerely,

[Your Name]