

Want to Grow Your Revenues? Talk to your associates and staff!

There once was a magical land where a king and the wealthy class owned all the businesses and oversaw thousands of skilled workers. The king and his Court never dared thank or speak to those toiling workers about their lives and how the various businesses could be improved. Soon workers were despondent, uncaring and bad-mouthing both the king and the land they used to love. Their work suffered and as a result, businesses stopped growing and profits fell.

Sound like a fairy tale or dare I say it...your law firm!

Now more than ever, it is truly important to VALUE your non-equity employees and seek their feedback. Law firms who do will quite simply, in my opinion, make more money.

Here is why:

1. Your associates and staff are ambassadors for the firm. If they are happy and involved in matters involving the firm, they will communicate that to others. They will speak highly of the firm and put a positive spin on what is happening there.
2. Happy employees do more high quality work than those who are disengaged and see the hours at the firm as "just a job".
3. Happy and involved employees are more likely to deliver outstanding service to clients and go beyond what is expected.

These three reasons all add up to greater revenues.

So what should your firm do?

There are some "bare minimum" activities that each firm should engage in to help insure the happiness of their workforce.

- The leaders of the firm should meet quarterly with both staff and associates and thank them for their work and describe what is happening at the firm (great victories, new personnel, new clients, new technology etc.).
- Feedback should be solicited. Some firms have suggestion boxes. Some have scheduled all lawyer/all employee sessions with the Managing Partner where concerns are raised-- and others have a 3rd party meet with their staff and associates as I have done many times. What you get from these sessions is amazing. At one I ran, associates pointed out numerous ways to reduce non-billable time, deliver better service to clients and gain better information on the firm's strengths which they could convey to others. Firms need to be receptive to this kind of feedback and willing to make changes based on it.

- Involve non-equity owners. Associates WANT to be involved in firm committees. They want to know the firm's strategic plan so they can help push it along. Staff wants to have a regular voice and provide muscle to new initiatives that can streamline client service.
- Look for and engage the special talents of your staff. One leading Chester County firm recently made their terrific "File Manager" the chief writer and publisher of the firm's brand spanning new internal newsletter. The newsletter is filled with great information about the firm and cheerful biographies of various staffers. It conveys great information and literally makes employees smile.
- When big decisions or plans are being launched, tell your people about them. It seems so simple but many firms do not solicit input from their associates and staff –or inform them about changes in the billing system, new technologies, visual identity standards, relocations or decisions to expand their client base into new industries and markets. These folks have great ideas and connections which can all help move the ball forward for your firm. And yes, having a voice and being informed does correlate with happier, more productive employees.
- Educate your attorneys and staff on things outside the practice of the firm which can really help the firm grow revenues. For example, teach associates how to network effectively. Teach staff the elements of a first impression and their role as representatives of the firm. Ask them what they would like continuing education on in the future.
- Mentor. Take associates to pitch meetings and client interviews (Tell the client they are not being billed at all for the lawyers' time). Let them see and be part of the marketing process. Enlist your staff's help in identifying who they know at various target companies or industries. Teach them how to use free databases to help with marketing research tasks. Keep them posted on how the effort to grow a client or bring in a new one is going.
- Spend time together. Schedule regular events which all attorneys and staff must attend! It does not work if only the staff shows up and a handful of lawyers. I have touted Hangley Aronchick in the past for having weekly all personnel lunches where lawyers and staff break bread together in their largest conference room and sample various caterers' fare. It is part of their culture now. I am sure this simple event has translated into a happier workplace—which in turn has created greater client satisfaction there. I recently learned that they expanded the conference room to accommodate more! I have suggested to several firms that they select a charity or endeavor of great interest to one of their key clients and engage all of their lawyers and staff to work with the client's personnel to effectuate great change. These events work on many levels.

So when we look at different ways for a firm to grow its business and deliver outstanding service, let's not neglect some of the easiest things to do. Involve your employees—empower them. And you will reap the rewards of that effort.

Stacy West Clark has been helping Philadelphia lawyers and law firms expand their practices for more than 20 years. She is a former attorney with Morgan Lewis & Bockius and was the firm's first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing, www.stacyclarkmarketing.com, a firm that helps law firms grow their businesses.