The Paralegal Voice

I recently had the pleasure of participating in my first ever podcast with hosts Lynne DeVenny and Vicki Voisin on The Paralegal Voice. Our discussion touched on a little bit of everything – practice management, ethics, and technology. It was a lot of fun and Lynne and Vicki are great interviewers. If you don't subscribe to their blogs or follow them on Twitter, you should.

The Unanswered Question
As you might suspect, our time went by quickly. Here are my thoughts on one of the questions we hoped to tackle — how paralegals can help market their firms and improve client relations.

Don't Damage the Client's Case Before It Begins
As a legal support professional, potential clients may approach you and want to talk about their case. Resist the temptation. You cannot give legal advice. The person you are talking to is *not* a client. Any conversation you have is *not* privileged, and it may be discoverable by the other side. Instead, steer the person firmly but politely to your firm. The prospect can make an appointment with a lawyer and discuss his or her private legal matter in confidence. This approach protects you, your firm, and the client.

T-R-E-A-T Clients Well
Once a prospect becomes a client, you can play a major role in promoting positive client relations. The key is to TREAT clients well: be Timely, Responsive, Empathetic, give Assurance, and deliver great Tangibles.

Timeliness and Responsiveness
Make every possible effort to respond to client phone calls, e-mails, and requests in a timely and responsive manner. If you see a delay developing (the lawyer is out of the office and won't be able to return a call as promised), inform the client of the delay. Keep deadline dates on your radar screen and prompt the lawyer. If the deadline can't be met, the lawyer can call the client and negotiate a new date. (Not always an easy call for the lawyer, but clients are far more understanding than we give them credit for–provided they know what's going on in their case.)

Empathy
Treat all clients with empathy and practice good listening skills. Often the most important client need you can meet is the need to be heard and understood. Keeping the human touch makes a big difference.

Assurance
Assurance is defined as certainty, confidence, and freedom from self-doubt. By giving assurance, we inspire client confidence in our firm and in ourselves as individuals.
You may think this element of client relations is outside your control, but it isn't. If you are confident in mind and manner, clients will be too.

Tangibles
Tangibles are the production end of the business: letters, e-mails, pleadings, and other documents that clients see, feel, and touch. Of all the elements of client relations, tangibles matter the *least* to clients (timeliness, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance are judged to be more important). Even so, tangibles are a reflection of our professionalism, and we should always take pride in producing quality work.
Remember T-R-E-A-T and you will be well on your way to improving client relations.

Originally posted at http://oregonlawpracticemanagement.wordpress.com/2010/01/25/the-paralegal-voice/ January 25, 2010.

Posted in Appreciation, Client Relations, Ethics, Marketing, Social Media | Tags: attorney client privilege, Client Relations, Ethics, Legal Talk Network, Lynne DeVenny, Marketing, Paralegal Mentor, podcast, Practical Paralegalism, The Paralegal Voice, Vicki Voisin