



Exceeding Clients' Expectations

By: Allison C. Shields

By under-promising and over-delivering, law firms can increase their bottom line and improve the reputation of lawyers in general, and that makes exceeding clients' expectations just good business.

Of course, there is an opposing viewpoint. Exceeding clients' expectations is considered by some to be a "stupid strategy." However, often, those that think exceeding expectations is the wrong path to take often base their opinion on the premise that exceeding clients' expectations offers more value to a customer than the customer wants, and cuts down on profitability.

But under-promising and over-delivering doesn't mean providing additional value to the client in such a way that it hurts the firm's profits. On the contrary, it creates increased profits by increasing client loyalty.

Often, exceeding clients' expectations does not require additional expenditures of money or time, and can be accomplished simply and effectively. Seemingly small changes can make a big impact. Some good examples include communicating with clients on a timely basis, ensuring that each contact the client has with the firm is pleasant and courteous, and making clients feel as if the firm cares about the client and her business.

Some define good client service as determining the client's wants, and then delivering exactly that and nothing more. In my opinion, this is not only short-sighted, but is a disservice to clients. Clients hire lawyers for their expertise, advice and experience. Sometimes what the client 'thinks' they want is, upon further reflection or exploration, not in the client's best interests. Often, the lawyer is able to suggest different alternatives that would better meet the client's needs, or more effectively accomplish the client's goals.

Creativity and innovation in the approach to a client's problems may be the best value a firm delivers. A mindset that places a premium on the client's stated wants and disregards the firm's ability to assess the situation and suggest alternatives, is a huge loss for clients and de-values the importance of hiring an attorney. It's this kind of thinking that leads people to the conclusion that legal services are a mere commodity.

In short, exceeding clients' expectations is an excellent strategy. It is the essence of good service.



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