

Grow Your Practice Series:

June 2007

101 Ways to Effectively Market Your Law Firm

No. 52: Learn to Better Serve Your Next Generation of Clients by Surveying Your Current Clients

Following up from last month's issue, if you agree that surveying your current clients to gain insight into how to more effectively attract new clients and better serve their needs makes sense, how do you get started? The next step is to design a client satisfaction survey. While that may seem like a daunting task, it is not, because we've done most of the work for you.

This month we address how to do that. Rather than providing you with guidelines for creating a client satisfaction survey, or taking you through the process of developing a client satisfaction, we drew on our in-house talent to have a person who's designed several very successful customer and client surveys to draw up the client satisfaction survey he would design for a personal injury law firm.



Guidelines: Here are some general concepts to follow to make a survey more effective:

- ◆ A mix of both closed-end questions (yes/no, true/false or multiple choice) and open-ended questions make the survey easy to respond to.
- ◆ Opening with easy-to-answer closed-end questions warms up the recipient for the harder open-ended questions toward the end of the survey.
- ◆ Among the multiple choices, give the respondent the opportunity to select total dissatisfaction and disappointment. That's why we are surveying your clients. Better they tell you than their friends, neighbors and co-workers!
- ◆ The survey must be able to be completed in three to five minutes, or you will lose the recipient. He or she will put it aside to complete later, and then never get to it.

Without further ado, here is our prototype client satisfaction survey.

Client Satisfaction Survey

You recently engaged our law firm to represent you. To better serve future clients, and to ensure that you received the level of service to which we are committed, we would very much appreciate your taking a few minutes to complete and return this survey. Simply answer each question as honestly as you can, and feel free to skip any questions for which you do not have an answer or do not want to answer. Please fold up the survey as indicated, and drop it in the mail. No stamp is necessary. We pay the postage.

How did the services provided by our law firm meet your expectations? (Please select one response that best fits how you feel.)

- You significantly exceeded my expectations!
- I was very satisfied with the services I received.
- You met my expectations.
- I was disappointed with the services provided by your law firm.
- I was totally unsatisfied with the services I provided by your law firm!

LawMax Legal Finance

459 Columbus Avenue, Suite 299
New York, New York 10024-5129

1-866-LAWMAX-8 (866-529-6298)

marketing@fundmycase.com • www.law-max.com

© 1999-2006 LawMax Legal Finance

How would you rate the professionalism of our law firm's support staff? *(Please select one response.)*

- They were all highly professional, courteous and very helpful!
- Some were very helpful and professional, while others were not.
- I was generally satisfied with the law firm's staff.
- I was a little disappointed. They could have been more professional and knowledgeable.
- I found your staff to be very unprofessional!

How would you rate the professionalism of the attorneys you dealt with at our law firm? *(Please select one response.)*

- They were all professional, courteous, considerate and very helpful!
- They were generally helpful, professional and courteous.
- I was generally satisfied with the attorneys who handled my case.
- I was not totally satisfied. I believe they could have done a better job.
- I was totally unsatisfied with the attorneys who worked on my case!

How do you feel about the ultimate outcome of your matter? *(Again, please select one response.)*

- I am very pleased! I could not be more satisfied with the outcome.
- I believe that your law firm did the best job they could, and I am generally pleased with the outcome.
- Your law firm did okay—certainly as good as any other firm could have done.
- I am a little disappointed. Another law firm could have done a better job.
- I am very disappointed. I did not get justice!

Would you recommend our law firm to someone in need of a personal injury attorney? *(Again, please select one response.)*

- I can recommend your law firm without reservation to anyone!
- I would recommend your law firm if someone asked me for a recommendation.
- I could recommend your law firm, but I would not go out of my way to do so.
- I would not be comfortable recommending your law firm to a friend, relative or co-worker.
- Under no circumstances would I recommend your law firm to anyone!

Please answer in your own words these questions:

- Your law firm's greatest asset is: _____

- Your law firm's greatest shortcoming is: _____

- You could provide better service to future clients if you: _____

- I was very pleased that you: _____

- I was disappointed that you: _____

After we review your responses, would you be willing to speak with us by telephone so we can gain a better understanding of how we met or did not meet your needs and expectations?

- Yes, I will spend a few minutes on the phone with you.
- Please do NOT call me.

A Good Starting Point: There may be more specific issues you need to address, such as the location of your offices or how a client heard about you, so feel free to add questions, delete them or modify them to your needs. However, for a law firm that wants to get a general idea of what kind of job they are doing serving the needs and meeting the expectations of their clients, this survey exactly as it appears here is a good start. To make it even easier, if you'd like this survey in a Word file, go back to the e-letter where you can directly download it.

Next Month: How do you design the actual survey so it is easy to mail to former clients, and easy for them to complete and mail back to you.

Managing Your Practice: Smarter Employee Hiring Leads to Less Employee Turnover, and That's Good for Morale and Productivity!

It is uncomfortable, time-consuming, demoralizing, disruptive and expensive to have to fire an employee. When an employee is let go, it is half the employee's fault and half the employer's fault. Did you hire the right person? Did you provide adequate training and orientation? Did you provide feedback so the employee knew what kind of job he or she was doing? These are all questions that must be asked and answered, but now you are faced with challenge of hiring a new employee. How do you find the right person the first time?

If you missed the article in the May **Attorney@law** about dealing with troublesome employees, please read it. The best way to deal with troublesome employees—those who arrive late and leave early, those who do not do what they are asked, those who are sloppy and unprofessional, those who spend too much time on personal phone calls and on the Internet, and employees who create problems for other employees are just a few examples—is to not hire them in the first place.



Hiring Right the First Time: Here are five guidelines for hiring the right employee the first time, and by so doing totally avoiding all those downstream problems.

1. Develop a Profile: Look at your current employees—specifically those who are doing a great job for you—and look for common traits among them. For example, if you need a new paralegal, look at your best current paralegals. Where did they receive their training? Where do they live? What are their outside interests? The police cannot profile the bad guys, but you can certainly create a profile of the type of employees that are more likely to fit into your corporate culture and are likely to work well with your current employees. As just one example, if all of your paralegals are middle-aged women with kids in high school and college, will a 23-year-old single paralegal fit in well with your current staff? Or are you better to look for an older candidate who has more in common with your current staff?

2. Use Third-Party Testing: There are several very affordable testing services that can give you a third-party look at a job candidate. Some of these tests are taken online, while other companies send you a question book and a test grid. The candidate fills in the answer grid (it's kinda like taking the SAT all over again), then you fax the answer grid into the testing company. The testing company faxes or e-mails you back an analysis of the candidate's job skills, personality traits and other characteristics, such as honesty and the ability to learn new skills. There are several testing companies out there. One that we can recommend is **Vangent Human Capital Management** (www.vangent-hcm.com).

3. Avoid Hiring Friends and Relatives: Many employers think they will do better hiring someone they know, such as a friend, neighbor or relative. In most cases, such hires do not work out, and many turn into disasters. The root of the problem is that the new hire thinks that he or she has a special status and does not have to follow the same rules as everyone else because he or she knows you, or her father is your neighbor, or his brother went to law school with you. If you do find a friend or relative who is extraordinarily qualified, and you do hire that person, you must make it very clear from the very beginning that your new employee will be treated no differently—no better and no worse—that every other employee. Also, never have a friend, friend of a friend, or relative report to you. Have him or her report to someone else so the employee-supervisor relationship is strictly professional.

Some employers think these tests are modern-day voodoo, but we know of several instances in which they were uncommonly accurate. For example, our marketing director remembers hiring Rob, a bright, handsome, sharp young man, despite test results that indicated that Rob was not trustworthy and was unreliable. Within one month on the job, it turned out that Rob had an ex-wife and two kids he'd never mentioned, several creditors were garnishing his wages, and he owed the IRS money! Rob was a charmer, but he could not fool the testing company!



4. Initially Hire the Employee for Just One Project: A very effective way to mitigate the risk is to initially hire the new employee for just one project. As an example, explain to a new paralegal that you specifically need assistance on two large cases. Hire her for a six-week period to work on just those two cases. At the end of the project, you do not have to fire her. Just thank her for her time and contribution, wish her the best, and part friends. If, however, she is terrific, ask her to join the firm on a permanent basis. The only problem with this approach, however, is that it only works when the candidate is out-of-work. A paralegal is not going to leave a permanent position for a temporary gig. If you are asking her to leave another firm, you are going to have to offer her a permanent position.

5. Use a Temp-to-Perm Program: One of the smartest and safest ways to hire exactly the right person is to take advantage of the temp-to-perm programs that temporary help firms offer. Let's say you need a new receptionist, and you've had a problem finding exactly the right person. Have a local temporary help agency with such a temp-to-perm program send you a receptionist as a temp. Try her out for a week or so. If she is just not right, ask for another person. The agency will send you as many receptionists as you need. When you finally find Ms. Right, you can offer her a full-time job with your firm. You will have to pay the agency a placement fee to hire her away from them, but you've also taken all the risk out of the hiring process.

A Front-End-Loaded Process: A little extra work and expense on the front end can result in very smart hiring decisions on the back end. And having the right people in place improves efficiency, productivity, professionalism and employee morale, and avoids a ton of aggravation and headaches down the road!

Next Month: Getting new employees off to a good start.



Legal Finance: Use This Valuable Service to Differentiate Your Law Firm!

When you first meet with a prospective new client, one of the questions you know he or she will ask you is "When will I see some money?" You already know that you are obliged to give that prospective new client as accurate and truthful an answer as you can. In many jurisdictions today, it is taking at least one year for civil cases to settle or receive a trial date. In some parts of the country, it is substantially longer. Maybe there's a better answer to that question?

What Is the Real Need? If the client is asking just because he wants to know, then the answer is a fairly standard one. It will take about a year if we decide to take the case to trial, but we may be able to reach an out-of-court settlement sooner. Then again, the defendant may play hardball, so we will not even be able to start serious negotiations until we actually file the lawsuit. For even more complex cases, it is difficult to predict when the case will be resolved.

Your New Client Really, Really Needs Cash! On the other hand, you do get clients who really need money, and they need it yesterday! They've been injured, so they've been out of work. The rent or mortgage is past due, the car payment is late, and they risk having the gas and electric shut off. This is a client who really, really, seriously needs cash and simply cannot wait a year. For a prospective new client such as this, there are two answers to the question "When will I see some money from my lawsuit?"

◆ **Standard Answer:** "It is currently taking about a year to get a trial date. I am afraid you will just have to tough it out until your case goes to trial or I can negotiate an out-of-court settlement. Sorry."

◆ **Maybe Better Answer:** "While it could take a year to go to trial, we know a company that may be able to advance you cash immediately so you can pay those critical bills."

The No-Cost, No-Risk Solution: Informing your clients about legal finance providers such as LawMax costs your law firm nothing. You assume no risk, yet you have the ability to differentiate your law firm from the others that prospective clients are talking to, and you can provide a higher level of service to clients in need.



Disclaimer: The Marketing Advice We Offer May NOT Be Applicable in Your State!

We try to provide practical marketing advice as part of this e-letter, but please be aware that everything we recommend may not be permissible in every state. Each state Bar Association has slightly different guidelines as to what is and is not ethical for an attorney to do in terms of advertising and promotion, and each state has different laws covering exactly how attorneys can promote their practices. We recommend that you make sure what we promote in **Attorney@law** is both ethical and legal in the jurisdictions in which you practice.