

Top 10 Mistakes that Solicitors make in Building Relationships with their Clients - By Stephanie Kosky

1. Being unavailable

There is nothing more infuriating for a client than being told consistently that the solicitor they are dealing with is a] unavailable b] in a meeting or, worst of all, c] too busy to speak to you. Obviously there will be many times when you are unavailable - you might even have gone out for lunch! - however make it a point that your secretary, receptionist or assistant is instructed to take a proper message and states that you will return the call as soon as you possibly can.

2. Failing to return telephone calls within one working day

See 1 above. Ensure that you do return telephone calls within the time scale or at least make sure that someone else does return the call with a reason why you haven't been able to do so yourself and a commitment to a time when you will return the call.

3. Failing to keep the client informed of progress on their matter

One of the most frequent complaints from clients of law firms is that they don't know what's happening in their case. This goes right across the board from conveyancing to litigation, family, company, commercial etc etc. A word in hand is better than a client on the warpath!

4. Refusing to negotiate on fees at all

Sometimes you have to! Perhaps you want to get into a particular client business and it's a sprat to catch a mackerel. Sometimes you'll need to discount for a high volume. It's often worth it to be flexible for the client satisfaction at the end of the day and the knowledge that the client will either increase their spend with you or refer you to other suitable clients.

5. Failing to coach support staff to understand the client's matter and so be able to field calls, enquiries etc

If you don't do this you are simply making an awful lot more work for yourself and disempowering your support staff who may repay you by working at a minimal level.

6. Using legal terminology or jargon that the client does not understand

Do you like consulting other professionals and not understanding what they are talking about?

7. Assuming that the client knows all areas of law the firm undertakes

How many times have you heard an existing client tell you apologetically that they have used your rivals to do something that your firm could have handled just as well if not better? When you tell them, how often do they say “ I didn’t know you did that sort of work”?

8. Failing to cross-sell

See 7 above

9. Assuming the client will stay with the firm

Why should you assume any such thing? Do you stay with suppliers if their service is only okay and their prices can be beaten? Only a constant effort to keep improving things for the client, day in and day out, will result in their staying with the firm and some of them will leave anyway for other reasons e.g. their brother-in-law has just started up in practice.

See also 7 and 8 above

10. Failing to keep in contact with the client after the matter has completed.

Who did you say you were? When did we speak last? These are the type of responses you may get if you don’t keep in touch. And again, why would they stay with a firm which doesn’t value them sufficiently to make the effort to keep in touch? Use ezines, telephone calls, Christmas Cards, quarterly letters, invitations to seminars, lunches, drinks, sponsored events etc etc.

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