

Are You Delighting Your Clients?

By Debra L. Rhodunda

Client satisfaction is a critical component to a successful law firm in today's competitive environment. Have you thought about it lately?

Some firms are going one step further. Not only are they meeting baseline client expectations, they are providing something additional—something clients may not even realize they want yet. The concept is better known as “client delight,” piggy-backing upon total quality and client satisfaction techniques. It is founded upon the principle that a competitive advantage can be gained by routinely anticipating and surpassing client expectations. Potential benefits to be gained include increased client satisfaction, strengthened relationships, and increased client loyalty.

The client delight concept has been used for years and has several success stories, with one of the best examples stemming from the automobile industry. The example is the cup holder feature, now a standard in most vehicles. Cars in the 1980's were traditionally not equipped with them. As people began to buy simple accessories from hardware stores or convenience stores to safely store beverages in transit, certain car manufacturers saw the trend and began installing cup holders in their car designs. The holders became a nice “extra” that delighted clients and differentiated the car from others. The offering surpassed client expectations and incited their purchase, giving those manufacturers a competitive advantage. As cup holders became standard, car manufacturers continued to create other features geared to delight clients.

Is there an extra feature, process improvement or service that could produce similar results to give your law firm a competitive advantage? Talk with one or two important

clients whose opinion you value. Open a dialogue with them about your interest in improving the quality of their interaction with the firm. Explain that you are interested in going beyond their baseline expectations. Their feedback should guide you in your efforts.

Key Principles to Client Delight:

Below are a few ways to delight your client:

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- **Anticipate client needs.** Prior to anticipating clients' needs, identify baseline service expectations and be sure you are meeting them. After achieving that, focus on exceeding the expectations of satisfied clients.

• **Give it for free.** Clients should feel that the new feature or service or product is a bonus and that they are not paying for it. You won't be exceeding their expectations if you tell them that they are going to be charged for the new service.

• **Keep doing it.** Client delight is not time specific. It is not a one-time event, but a continuous process. While a particular feature or service is new, delight is high. As it becomes standard, its excitement wanes. The real question becomes, what's next? ♦

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