**Rainmaking at its Best: Focusing on Clients First**

*By Kimberly Alford Rice*



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Lawyers still struggle with cultivating and strengthening their relationships with clients and contacts. I hear over and over again that the lawyers don't want to appear "pushy" or "aggressive" in introducing the client/contact to the services they provide or that their firm provides. My advice to them is usually a variation on the same theme: it's not about you!

Too often, lawyers focus too much on what they do and not enough on what the client/contact may be interested in: their industry, their business performance, and their problems, opportunities, and the constant changes they confront.

If attorneys would reflect on how they desire to be treated by their service providers, the level of service they expect and the responsiveness they require, providing that same level of service to their clients would not be too difficult (think the Golden Rule).  
  
Have you evaluated how "client focused" you are?  Do you make a concerted effort to be attentive to your client's needs first and keep conversations about the client, not you?  Below are a few tips to keep in mind:

* Listen more, talk less
* Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions to learn more
* Avoid promoting your experience and that of your firm (it's the cost of admission to even get this far)
* Find out your clients'/contacts' pain points and address how you may be of service in these areas or offer qualified referrals
* Under promise and over deliver with work product.
* Exceed expectations every time.

Never before has it so critical for lawyers to listen and understand their clients and their needs. In case you’ve been hiding under a rock somewhere, clients are why we all have a practice and income. To truly take demonstrative steps to forge a deeper relationship with your clients, you may want to follow the approach Harry Mills, author of The Rainmaker's Toolkit, recommends as the **EAR recovery formula**:

**1. Empathize.**

Demonstrate you understand the client's problem and his/her needs. Learn what caused them to say, "That's it, I've had enough!"

Next, drill down to the heart of the anger festering inside them. Ask about the problems they've experienced with your firm previously.

**2. Ask.**

After you've listened to your client's problems and concerns, ask what you can do to save the business relationship. This would be a great time to be direct and candid.

You may ask, "What can we do to make right the trouble we've put you through and keep you as a client?"

**3. Respond.**

This is your time to shine. Respond in a way that demonstrates that you understand the severity of your client’s complaints and that you are committed to righting the course. Low-cost or grandiose offers will only send clients running for the door – take your time.

Use this system to help you identify which clients are about to defect and potentially how you can save the relationship. **Lend an ear, ask the right questions, and then respond with a tailored solution.**

In this fierce legal services environment, the client is in the drivers' seat. To advance strong relationships, lawyers are well advised to adjust their mindset and best practices to be more "client centric" than ever before. You can't afford *not* to be.  Often, this shift requires learning and practicing new disciplines and behaviors, and that's ok as long as the result is still the same: clients are happy with your relationship and it becomes long-term.

One of the services KLA Marketing Associates provides its clients is professional training and coaching to help them to master the art of relationship cultivation and long-term client service skills.  What could be more important than developing super satisfied clients to advance your practice?

Contact us today to learn how we may help your firm maximize its client relationships in 2011.