

5 easy steps to improving your law firm's customer service

Law firms and customer service don't always go hand in hand. Unfortunately, the legal profession is notorious for poor communication, sketchy billing practices and customer service that leaves much to be desired.

There are numerous reasons why this negative reputation has stuck with the industry. For one, many attorneys view their legal abilities as more important than their client relationships. They feel that, as long as they are delivering in the courtroom, their demeanor and customer service doesn't matter. It's also worth mentioning that the proper provision of client service is rarely taught, or even mentioned, in law school. Lawyers are taught to deal with facts and legal analysis, not client reassurance and trust-building.

Whatever the reason, far too many law firms fall short when it comes to delivering successful customer experience, resulting in missed opportunities to grow their practices and increase profitability.

Here are five easy steps you can immediately take to improve your law firm's level of customer service:

#1 Consider the client's perspective

When clients seek your legal services, they are often going through the toughest times in their lives. From divorce to bankruptcy to fighting criminal prosecution, they are vulnerable and probably terrified of what may happen. These difficult situations can make even the most mild-mannered person act irrationally.

Instead of being annoyed or exasperated by your client's behavior, try considering their perspective and employing a bit of compassion. You are seeing them at their worst, but a few encouraging words from you can completely calm the situation.

It's called emotional intelligence, which is the ability to recognize how people are feeling and empathize with them. Clients appreciate this effort because it makes them feel that you are invested in the outcome of the case and not simply working for billable hours.

Now, that doesn't mean that you or your staff members should be emotional punching bags for your clients. If their actions are too irrational, you may want to take the necessary steps to end the attorney-client relationship. But, for most clients, a little empathy and emotional intelligence can go a long way in providing effective customer service.

#2 Start from the beginning

The process of establishing good customer service doesn't begin after a potential client becomes an actual client. It starts from the minute a potential client attempts to contact your office.

Consider this statistic: More than 40% of potential clients who leave a voicemail for a law office or fill out a website informational form end up waiting up to three days before receiving a response. What does that say about a firm's customer service?

The initial contact and client intake processes offer valuable opportunities to establish your firm's commitment to customer service. From the initial contact to securing the matter, each communication with the client should convey that you are a client-centered firm dedicated to providing a high level of service.

Use active listening during every interaction to ensure that you are hearing your client's concerns and adequately responding to them. Your clients will appreciate your efforts and feel more secure with your services.

#3 Return phone calls and emails

No client should be waiting days or even weeks for a reply to their phone call or email. This is the highest level of unprofessionalism and one of the most common complaints made by law firm clients. Messages should always be returned within a reasonable amount of time – preferably 24 hours or less.

If that sounds like a lot, set aside a specific time each day to only return messages. That way, you aren't inundated with calls and emails throughout your busy day. You can also secure help from staff members, empowering them to answer the questions they can, so you are only dealing with the most complex questions.

Even if you don't yet know the exact answer, keeping clients in the know can go a long way to calming fears and keeping the peace. Let clients know upfront how often they can expect to hear from you and which methods of communication work best – then follow through. If you told them to expect a weekly call or email from you, then that is what you need to deliver.

#4 Clearly communicate firm procedures

The initial consultation is also a time for setting other expectations, including those related to billing and representation parameters. Be clear about the costs of representation and how your legal services will be invoiced. If you are offering fixed-fee billing, provide the client with a detailed explanation of what that means – specifically what is and is not included within the stated fee.

It's also useful to keep the legal jargon to a minimum when communicating with clients. Complicated language can lead to frustration and leave the client feeling belittled. Make sure you use plain English to discuss the case and take a little time to explain concepts that your client doesn't understand.

By setting clear expectations upfront, you can establish your firm as client-focused, while also avoiding costly conflicts down the line.

#5 Get some help from legal tech

The legal tech market has numerous software options to help you improve your law firm's customer service. For example, TimeSolv offers a client portal that helps keep your clients consistently updated on all things related to their representation.

By logging into their individual account, clients can view their accounts and invoices, along with work completed on their matters. It's convenient, easy-to-use, and a useful tool for successful customer service.

Happy clients = Greater profitability

Customer service is the key to the growth and profitability of your law firm. By implementing some of these tips, you can establish your firm as a client-centered practice offering the highest level of customer service.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, Personal Touch Edits, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.