

# 10 SECRETS TO DEVELOPING CLIENT LOYALTY

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Potential clients are bombarded by over 3000 messages a day meant to persuade their spending habits. Whether it's the billboard they drive past everyday to work, the label on the bottle of Pepsi they're drinking, or the Cadillac emblem on the car they're stuck behind in traffic, these visual messages are meant to create top-of-mind-awareness and persuade the consumer the next time they're in the market to buy a certain product or service. With the huge amounts of messages reaching them every day, it's no wonder that consumer habits can change at the drop-of-a-hat.

That said, client loyalty is of the utmost importance. Simplistic messages that create top-of-mind-awareness cannot sway the loyal client. While the competition is spending dollars upon dollars on ways to increase client volume, many of them are forgetting the importance of their existing clients. Forgetting this will almost certainly lead to a number of unsatisfied clients, which will likely never become loyal clients.

A loyal client and a satisfied client are not to be confused. While client satisfaction is an element of loyalty, a client could be satisfied and still feel no connection to you or your firm. A loyal client consists of five things:

- 1. The overall satisfaction of doing business with your law firm.**
- 2. The willingness to build a relationship with you and your company.**
- 3. The willingness to be a repeat client.**
- 4. The willingness to recommend you to others.**
- 5. The reluctance to switch to another law firm.**

In order for your clients to achieve those 5 things, there are 10 rules that you and your employees should follow every day:

## 1. GREET CLIENTS PROMPTLY

A survey clocked the number of seconds people had to wait to be greeted in several businesses. Researchers then asked clients how long they had been waiting. In every case, the client's estimate of the time elapsed was much longer than the actual time. A client waiting 30 or 40 seconds often feels like it's been 3 or 4 minutes. Time drags when people are waiting. Thus, one of the things we can do to greet clients properly is not to put them on hold and to answer the phone on its first ring when being paged by the receptionist.



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This is a good time to tell you that one of your best investments is a good receptionist. This person can make or break your firm depending on how well they deal with people. Give this person great latitude to get the call answered, and if the rest of the firm doesn't fall in line, afford this person an open door policy. I have found time and time again that the receptionist knows if you are meeting client satisfaction goals.

## **2. APPLY GOOD CONVERSATION SKILLS**

It is always nice to talk to people like they are in your living room. People in general are intimidated by lawyers in law offices. It should be your job to make them feel comfortable, as they have already been through a traumatic event. Something to break the ice would be the weather; for example, "Isn't the sunshine just beautiful?" or "The snowfall's great, isn't it?" Look for clues about the client's interest. Also, you must understand that interaction means that both parties must have an opportunity to participate. If one party monopolizes the conversation, both sides lose.

Some preferred topics are what we refer to as small talk. Americans prefer to talk about weather, sports, jobs, mutual acquaintances, and past experiences, especially ones they have in common with their conversation partners. Most Americans are taught to avoid discussing politics or religion, especially with people they do not know well. Sex, bodily functions, and emotional problems, considered very personal topics, are likely to be discussed only with close friends or professionals trained to help.

## **3. BUILD A RAPPORT WITH THE CLIENT**

Remember that you are building a relationship with your client. They must know that their case is the top priority, and that you are there for them.

1. Be a good listener
2. Relate to what they are going through.
3. Invite feedback.

## **4. BE SINCERE AND SHOW EMPATHY TO THE OTHER PERSON**

I have preached for years that *But for the grace of God, go I*. You should understand that these people are hurting and coming to us for assistance.

## **5. USE GOOD PHONE TECHNIQUES**



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A key to successful phone use is simply to remember that your client cannot see you. Your challenge is to use your voice to make up for all the lost nonverbal communication. The best ways to use the phone effectively are:

1. Give the caller your name. Let the caller know who you are just as you would in a face-to-face situation.
2. Smile into the phone. Somehow people can hear us smile over the phone! Some telephone pros place a mirror in front of them while they are on the phone.
3. Keep your caller informed. If you need to look up information, tell the client what you are doing. Don't leave them holding a dead phone with no clue as to whether you are still with them.
4. Invite the caller to get to the point. Use questions such as "how can I assist you today" or "what can I do for you".
5. Commit to the requests of the caller; tell the caller specifically what you will do and when you will get back to them.
6. Thank the caller. This lets the caller know when the conversation is over.
7. Let your voice fluctuate in tone, rate, and loudness. You hold people's attention by putting a little life into your voice. Express honest reactions in expressive ways. Let your voice tone be natural and friendly.
8. Use *hold* carefully. People hate being put on hold. It is necessary to explain why, and break in periodically to let them know they haven't been forgotten. If what you are doing will take longer than a few minutes, ask the caller if you can call them back. Write down your commitment to call them back, and do not miss it.
9. Use friendly, common, tactful words. Never accuse the client of anything, and never convey that the request is an imposition.

## 6. ENJOY PEOPLE AND THEIR DIVERSITY

Every person is different; each has a unique personality. People who tend to bug us the most are the ones who are not like us. Recognize this, then accept this diversity and learn to enjoy it. Know that people's needs are basically the same; similarly, when we treat them like guests, with dignity and courtesy, it will create goodwill, most of the time.

## 7. CALL PEOPLE BY THEIR NAMES

People love to hear their names. Think about the times when someone unexpectedly addressed you by your name...didn't it feel good? Didn't you feel less like a number and more like someone who is valued?



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People appreciate it when you make the effort to learn their name and use it. Here are some ways to make the most of name-calling:

1. When appropriate, introduce yourself to the client and ask his or her name.
2. Avoid being overly familiar too quickly. It's normally safe to address people as Mr. Smith or Mrs. Jones. It could be seen as rude if you call them by their first name too quickly.
3. If you aren't sure how to pronounce the name, ask the client.
4. If a person has an unusual or interesting name, comment on it in a positive way.
5. If a person shares a name with someone in your family or with a friend, comment on that.

People are usually proud of their names and will feel honored when you acknowledge it. Take time to learn and use client's names.

## **8. WEAR YOUR SMILE WHEN A CLIENT COMES INTO THE OFFICE**

Always put on your smile when somebody comes into the office. Be complimentary. Complimenting takes only a second, and can add enormous good will. If you don't do this very often, get into the habit of saying something complimentary to each of your clients. Safe grounds for sincere compliments are as follows:

1. Some article of clothing they are wearing
2. Their children
3. Their behavior
4. Something they own
5. Their helpfulness; for example, "Thank you for filling out the forms so carefully, that will help."

## **9. FISH FOR NEGATIVE FEEDBACK**

What?! Fish for negative feedback?? Exactly. Negative feedback is the kind that helps you improve. In client service, there is no neutral gear; we either move forward or we slip backwards. The best way to get feedback is to let clients know that you really want their honest opinion...good or bad news...and provide ways for them to tell you.

A good way to do this is to use open-ended questions when people express their ideas. An open-ended question cannot be answered with a simple yes, no, or a one-worded



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response. Below are common questions you hear every day in businesses that can be easily changed to open-ended:

*Instead of saying:*

"How was everything?"

"Can I get you something else?"

"Will that be all?"

"Was everything satisfactory?"

"Did we meet your needs?"

*Say:*

"What else can I do for you?"

"What else can I get for you?"

"What else can I do for you?"

"What else could we do better to serve you?"

"How else can we be of help?"

## **10. LIVE BY THE GOLDEN RULE**

I have preached this ever since I started practicing law. Simply put, *Treat people the way you would want to be treated.*

### **THE FINAL CAVEAT**

These rules are so simple, it constantly amazes me that other law firms do not put them into play. I have come to realize that it's the leadership's responsibility to set the standards. These rules as the basis of a client loyalty program have to be non-negotiable. You absolutely, 100%, must be willing to terminate your highest income producer or your best non-lawyer, if they don't believe in client loyalty. I have done it, and never regretted it.

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