

‘It would be my pleasure’: How we ought to be treating clients

By Paul T. Llewellyn

Whenever I embark upon a new case, I often begin by looking up the opposing counsel: I want to get a sense of who they are, their background, and their experience. Almost invariably there is a statement on the firm’s website about putting clients first. It’s such an obvious concept. Do these firms actually think they’ve somehow unlocked the secret weapon to being a great lawyer? Has our profession become so driven by ego that we think considering the needs of our clients is actually a novel or innovative approach to the practice of law?

I sincerely hope not.

Of course, we all should be putting our clients first. The practice of law is ultimately about customer service, and most firms would do well to take a lesson from our corporate cousins on this front. Whether you realize it or not, law firms must now compete with the Amazons, Ritz-Carltons, and Zappos of the world. When it comes to customer service, clients compare us not to other law firms, but rather, companies such as these. It’s not enough to be slightly more responsive than Jones, Smith & Jones; instead, we have to provide the same attention and care these clients receive every time they walk into an Apple store. Only by adopting such a mentality and culture will a law firm truly thrive.



What makes that even more of a challenge is the fact that clients often turn to us in states of extreme stress. If a family member has just been arrested or died, if your spouse has run off with your neighbor or your business partner has fled with the company earnings, you most likely already have some pretty significant trust issues. That means the attorney is going to need to go the extra mile to make clients feel heard.

One tool successful companies use to gauge customer satisfaction is the Net Promoter Score (or NPS). NPS scores are calculated by asking customers one simple but very important question: on a scale from 0 to 10, how

likely are you to recommend this product or company to a friend or colleague? According to Law Technology Today, the legal industry currently has an NPS in line with airlines, wireless carriers, and credit card companies. By contrast, companies known for excellent customer service and incredible business growth, such as Amazon, have NPS scores many multiples higher.

The good news for law firms is that the bar is significantly lower, and if a firm just takes some relatively small steps to improve client satisfaction, it could make a substantial difference in how clients, i.e., your customers, view the firm.

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Anyone can create memorable, positive experiences for their clients. It takes a little effort, but it's well worth it. You just have to be observant. Engage in conversation not only to be friendly, but also to find out more about them. If you can create a remarkable customer experience, something unexpected, then you know they're going to remember it for a long time—and tell others. Why shouldn't we hold ourselves to the bar that five-star hotels hold themselves to?

I've given presentations on how to bring the hotel service experience into the realm of law firms. As I tell my audiences, we all ought to be striving for the Ritz-Carlton experience. At the Ritz-Carlton, all the team members, from housekeeping to bellboys,

are empowered to do whatever it takes to help a guest. They don't have to go through layers of management in order to get approval. If a guest requests something, they aren't allowed to say yes or no; they always respond with, "It would be my pleasure." That's the kind of culture that law firms can build in order to set themselves apart.

To achieve that level of customer service, law firms must begin at the top: partners need to educate themselves about best practices in customer service before training their employees. The best approach is to take a page from corporate models, which begin with goal setting and the creation of action plans, followed by training, implementation, and

thorough assessment, all in the name of continuous quality improvement.

At the end of the day, you want your current and former clients to become members of your cult. I know what you're probably thinking: there are absolutely no reasons why you'd want your firm associated with a cult, which immediately brings to mind a group of religious fanatics brainwashing impressionable people to join them. But our culture is actually brimming with cults. Nike is a cult. Apple is a cult: why else would people camp out on a sidewalk overnight just for the opportunity to buy their newest phone the day it's released? Thought of that way, a cult is simply people who believe in your product and are

willing—eager, even—to advocate for that product. That kind of endorsement ought to be the goal of every law firm. We want our clients, and even our prospective clients, to be fans. We want them to advocate for us and, in the end, to choose us when they need legal services. We want them to recommend us to others and create an exponential impact by telling everyone they know about our firm.

Client service is more than a tagline on a website. Building rapport and relationships, and creating satisfied clients means they'll be that much more likely to stick with your firm for years to come and re-recommend your firm to others. Or, if I may say it, become a member of your cult.