

# What Do Clients Really Want? It's Time You Found Out

By Anne E. Thar, Vice President and General Counsel, ISBA Mutual

**W**hat is the number one attribute that most clients seek from their lawyers? Superior legal skills? Wrong. Reasonable legal fees? Nope. A proven track record? Wrong again, oh clueless one.

The simple answer is that clients want to know you care. It's sort of like kids and their parents. You don't have to be the smartest parent on the block, the most athletic, the hippest, or the most successful. If you truly care and pay attention to your children, they will love you—even when you make mistakes.

The notion that clients care more about how we treat them than the legal work we perform is unsettling. It offends our sense of professionalism. Instead, we persist in believing that we need only worry about the quality of our legal work. With that attitude, lawyers will not only have empty waiting rooms, but legal malpractice claims as well.

Each year, many legal malpractice claims are brought by clients who received adequate lawyering but who were really, really ticked off about the way they were treated by their attorneys. Poor client-relations skills, such as unreturned telephone calls and constant interruptions during client meetings, plant a seed of discontent in the client's mind. From there, it is a small leap for the client to assume that her matter was neglected, the fees were unreasonable, or that an unfavorable outcome was somehow the fault of her uncaring lawyer.

Now that we know what clients want, how can lawyers measure their effectiveness in delivering that elusive warm and fuzzy feeling to clients? We suggest a client-relations questionnaire, something like the sample below. You



***Here's a survey to  
help you improve  
your deskmanner.***

may find the results enlightening.

In tailoring a client survey to your practice, don't focus the questions on the quality of your legal work. Remember, the point is to gauge your client-communication skills, not your legal acumen. Also, keep the survey short and simple enough to be completed in five minutes or less. Pay attention to the physical layout. Use a large type size and generous spacing to make the survey easier to read.

You'll also need a way to quantify the survey results. For example, assign points to each response (strongly disagree = 1 point; disagree = 3 points; uncertain = 5 points; agree = 7 points; and strongly agree = 10 points.) You can then calculate a score for each questionnaire.

Finally, have the courage and determination to make changes based upon the survey results. Otherwise, you've wasted your and your clients' time. In a future article I'll discuss ways to improve your client relation and communication skills.

## Client Relations Questionnaire

Please help us improve our service by filling out the following questionnaire and returning it in the enclosed envelope. We will keep all information confidential and anonymous. Your responses will be combined with those of other clients in a summarized report.

The questionnaire should be completed for your primary attorney. If you would like to fill out a questionnaire for another attorney who assisted you, please use a separate questionnaire. Be as candid as possible. As thanks for your cooperation, we will donate a dollar to a local charity for every questionnaire that is completed.

1. Identify the lawyer you are evaluating ("Lawyer"):  
 Perry Mason     Atticus Finch     Jackie Chiles     Clarence Darrow
2. Identify the type of legal matter with which Lawyer most recently assisted you.  
 Real Estate     Personal Injury Matter     Divorce/Family Law  
 Business Matter     Wills and Estates     Workers' Compensation
3. How long have you been a client of Lawyer?  
 less than 1 year     1 to 3 years     over 3 years
4. Approximately how many times have you met face to face with Lawyer on your most recent legal matter (excluding depositions and court appearances)?  
 1 time     2 to 4 times     5 to 7 times     8 or more times
5. When you have an office appointment, how long do you usually wait before seeing Lawyer?  
 0 to 10 minutes     10 to 20 minutes     20 to 30 minutes
6. Approximately how often have you talked with Lawyer on the telephone regarding your legal matter?  
 1 time     2 to 5 times     5 to 9 times     10 or more times
7. How quickly does Lawyer generally return your telephones calls?  
 within 1 hour     by the end of the day     within 24 hours  
 within 2 to 3 days     within 4 to 6 days     within 7 or more days
8. How often does Lawyer update you on your legal matter?  
 at least once a month     every 2 months     every 3 to 6 months     never

Lawyer:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. Makes me feel comfortable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Spends enough time with me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Answers all of my questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Listens to what I'm saying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Does not permit interruptions while talking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Explains legal terms, concepts, and procedures to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Explains the legal fees and expenses for which I am responsible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Completes work in a timely manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Keeps me updated on my matter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Charges a reasonable fee for the legal services performed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Provides enough information so that I can make decisions about my legal matter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Refers me to other professionals, including legal experts, when they are needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Is sensitive to my personal goals and needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. I am generally satisfied with the service I received from Lawyer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. I would recommend Lawyer to a friend or colleague.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the service provided by Lawyer? <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent					

Please provide us with any other information that you believe would be helpful:

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