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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN ■ TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

Focus on the Quality Of Your Service

Law is a relationship business. Clients retain lawyers whom they like and who treat them with respect. Yet clients often complain that their lawyers are too busy to return their calls, don't keep in touch regularly, don't meet deadlines and can be condescending. You need to focus on the service skills and qualities that build successful relationships and inspire confidence in your abilities as a lawyer, adviser and team player.

Be available and responsive. Whether it's another lawyer in the firm or a client seeking your help, try to take phone calls as they come in. And return e-mails and phone messages promptly, even if you can only call to schedule a time to talk in greater depth. If you will be out for more than an hour, instruct your secretary or the receptionist on how and where people can reach you, when you will be back and whether someone else can help callers in your absence.

Organize your time. Think ahead. Alert your staff and others to upcoming deadlines and to the nature of the work that must be completed. At the beginning of each week, review the week's schedule and deadlines. Prioritize and delegate tasks accordingly.

Meet deadlines. Make sure you understand the deadlines tied to an assignment. Establish a timeline of critical dates by when you will complete each phase, seek feedback, and sched-

ule support assistance. Keep in touch with others about the assignment's progress, particularly if you're hitting snags that may delay delivery. Whenever possible, finish and deliver projects early. It will impress your clients and supervising lawyers.

Follow up and communicate status. Don't wait for clients or supervising lawyers to call for a status report. Get in touch *first* to let them know what you found out or did in response to a question—and make sure you're on the right track. Be certain that supervisors and clients received documents you sent to them.

Earn their Loyalty

Assuming that the technical quality of a product or service is acceptable and the price is reasonable, the way a company or individual delivers customer service determines whether someone becomes a satisfied *repeat* customer and willingly refers others. Always remember, while your credentials, intelligence and ability to produce excellent work product are important, they are far from the only issues involved in satisfying your clients. ■



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Checklist

How to Execute Winning Client Service Strategies

- Put clients first. Make every client feel important and valued.
- Be the first person your client hears on the telephone. Don't overscreen your calls or have a secretary place calls for you.
- Update your voice mail daily and let the receptionist, your secretary and your colleagues know when, where and how to reach you at any given time.
- Always return phone calls and e-mails within four to six hours or by the end of the business day.
- Try to complete projects ahead of time and communicate regularly about a project's status, especially if you encounter a problem or delay.
- Be professional and helpful in every way that you communicate. Go the extra mile to answer a question or resolve a problem.
- Ask clients and colleagues for their feedback on how well you're doing for them.
- Do what you can to provide exceptional service to keep clients satisfied. Remember that if it weren't for our clients, external or internal (i.e., firm partners and other supervisors), we wouldn't be in business.