

# On the Subject of Clients

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*Lawyers' gowns are lined with the willfulness of their clients.*

—Proverb

**W**hen it comes to the practice of law, the best definition of clients I've ever heard is this: *Clients—Very special people who drive most attorneys crazy.*

Does that work for you? After all, it's a rare client who shows any appreciation for what an attorney has to go through to do the job as promised. Don't they always think the price is too high? And don't they focus on problems, broken promises, and the mistakes they think you make, rather than all the times you bend over backward to give them what they need?

Do you ever hear other attorneys voice these complaints? More to the point, have you ever voiced them yourself? Well, you're not alone. I have yet to meet an attorney who doesn't suffer from a strong case of client confusion.

Client confusion is about:

- What your client really wants
- How to communicate effectively with your client
- How to keep your client happy
- How to deal with client dissatisfaction
- Whom to call a client

## Confusion 1: What Does Your Client Really Want?

Your clients aren't just people; they're very specific kinds of people. Let me share with you the six categories of clients as seen from the E-Myth marketing perspective: (1) tactile clients, (2) neutral clients, (3) withdrawal clients, (4) experimental clients, (5) transitional clients, and (6) traditional clients.

Your entire marketing strategy must be based on which type of client you are dealing with. Each of the six client types spends money on legal services for very different, and identifiable, reasons. These are:

1. Tactile clients get their major gratification from interacting with other people.
2. Neutral clients get their major gratification from interacting with inanimate objects (a computer, a car, information).
3. Withdrawal clients get their major gratification from interacting with ideas (thoughts, concepts, stories).
4. Experimental clients rationalize their buying decisions by perceiving that what they bought is new, revolutionary, and innovative.
5. Transitional clients rationalize their buying decisions by perceiving that what they bought is dependable and reliable.
6. Traditional clients rationalize their buying decisions by perceiving that what they bought is cost-effective, a good deal, and worth the money.

In short:

1. If your client is tactile, you have to emphasize the *people* of your practice.
2. If your client is neutral, you have to emphasize the *technology* of your practice.
3. If your client is a withdrawal client, you have to emphasize the *idea* of your practice.
4. If your client is an experimental client, you have to emphasize the *uniqueness* of your practice.
5. If your client is transitional, you have to emphasize the *dependability* of your practice.
6. If your client is traditional, you have to talk about the *financial competitiveness* of your practice.

What your clients want is determined by who they are. Who they are is regularly demonstrated by what they do. Think about the clients with whom you do business. Ask yourself: In which of the categories would I place them? What do they do for a living?

If you're working with a mechanical engineer on a labor lawsuit, for example, it's probably safe to assume that he's a neutral client. If another one of your clients is a cardiologist, she's probably tactile. Accountants tend to be traditional and software engineers are often experimental.

Having an idea about which categories your clients may fall into is very helpful to figuring out what they want. Of course, there's no exact science to it, and human beings constantly defy stereotypes. So don't take my word for it. You'll want to make your own analysis of the clients you serve.

## Confusion 2: How to Communicate Effectively with Your Client

The next step in the client satisfaction process is to decide how to magnify the characteristics of your practice that are most likely to

appeal to your preferred category of client. That begins with what marketing people call your *positioning strategy*.

What do I mean by *positioning* your practice? You position your practice with words. A few well-chosen words to tell your clients exactly what they want to hear. In marketing lingo, those words are called your USP, or unique selling proposition.

For example, if you are targeting tactile clients (ones who love people), your USP could be: "Timothy Thompson Law Offices, where the feelings of people *really* count!" This might be particularly effective for a practice that focuses on family law or other emotionally charged legal issues.

If you are targeting experimental clients (ones who love new, revolutionary things), your USP could be: "Timothy Thompson Law Offices, where living on the edge is a way of life!" In other words, when they choose to hire someone from your practice, they can count on your legal services being unique, original, and on the cutting edge.

Is this starting to make sense? Do you see how the ordinary things most attorneys do to get clients can be done in a significantly more effective way?

Once you understand the essential principles of marketing the E-Myth way, the strategies by which you attract clients can make an enormous difference in your market share.

## Confusion 3: How to Keep Your Client Happy

Let's say you've overcome the first two confusions. Great. Now how do you keep your client happy? Very simple: Just keep your promise! And make sure that your client *knows* you kept your promise every step of the way.

In short, giving your clients what they think they want is the key to keeping your clients (or anyone else, for that matter) really happy.

If your clients need to interact with people (high touch, tactile), make certain that they do.

If they need to interact with things (high-tech, neutral), make certain that they do.

If they need to interact with ideas (in their head, withdrawal), make certain that they do.

And so forth.

At E-Myth, we call this your *client fulfillment system*. It's the step-by-step process by which you do the task you've contracted to do and deliver what you've promised—on time, every time.

But what happens when your clients are *not* happy? What happens when you've done everything I've mentioned here and your client is still dissatisfied?

#### Confusion 4: How to Deal with Client Dissatisfaction

If you have followed each step up to this point, client dissatisfaction will be rare. But it can and will still occur—people are people, and some people will always find a way to be dissatisfied with something. Here's what to do about it:

1. Always listen to what your clients are saying. And never interrupt while they're saying it.
2. After you're sure that you've heard all of your client's complaint, make absolutely certain you understand what she said by phrasing a question, such as: "Can I repeat what you've just told me, Ms. Ancona, to make absolutely certain I understand you?"
3. Secure your client's acknowledgement that you have heard her complaint accurately.
4. Apologize for whatever your client thinks you did that dissatisfied her, even if you didn't do it!
5. After your client has acknowledged your apology, ask her exactly what would make her happy.

6. Repeat what your client told you would make her happy, and get her acknowledgement that you have heard correctly.
7. If at all possible, give your client exactly what she has asked for.

You may be thinking, "But what if my client wants something totally impossible? Or even illegal?"

Don't worry. If you've followed my recommendations to the letter, what your client asks for will seldom seem unreasonable. And they will cease asking you to violate your ethical canons or the law itself. Or they'll go to some other attorney when they want to play fast and loose with the law.

#### Confusion 5: Whom to Call a Client

At this stage, it's important to ask yourself some questions about the kind of clients you hope to attract to your practice:

- Which types of clients would you most like to do business with?
- Where do you see your real market opportunities?
- Who would you like to work with, provide legal services to, and position your business for?

To what category of client are you most drawn? A tactile client for whom people are most important? A neutral client for whom the mechanics of how you practice law is most important? An experimental client for whom cutting-edge innovation is important? A traditional client for whom low cost and certainty of delivery are absolutely essential?

Once you've defined your ideal clients, go after them. There's no reason you can't attract these types of people to your legal practice and give them exactly what they want.

In short, *it's all up to you*. No mystery. No magic. Just a systematic process for shaping your practice's future. But you must have the

passion to pursue the process. And you must be absolutely clear about every aspect of it.

Until you know your clients as well as you know yourself.

Until all your complaints about clients are a thing of the past.

Until you accept the undeniable fact that client acquisition and client satisfaction are more science than art.

But unless you're willing to grow your practice, you better not follow any of these recommendations. Because if you do what I'm suggesting, it's going to grow.

This brings us to the subject of *growth*. But first, let's listen to what Robert and Sandy have to say about clients.

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