

Stretching client loyalty

Achieving a degree of client loyalty generally isn't something that happens overnight. Normally it's the culmination of lots of positive activity over a period of time, or perhaps a particularly successful outcome under challenging conditions. However you get there, client loyalty guarantees you at the very least the client's consideration for future requirements.

It's not uncommon for such loyalty to revolve around one particular individual at the firm, whose efforts have engendered the association. Such relationships generally endure and can easily grow beyond the confines of a strictly commercial arrangement and can present both risk and opportunity to a firm.

We are mindful of the risk that clients can move wholesale when a partner leaves, but this is by no means a forgone conclusion and significant opportunities are there to be enjoyed otherwise. Many firms benefit from cross referral opportunities where a successful partner/client relationship leads to new instructions across other areas of the business. Here firms rely on the goodwill created by one specific individual to drive fees for others. But what happens when these others offer less than a suitable experience to the client?

To start with nothing.

Loyal clients by their very nature are more forgiving of minor indiscretions than perhaps their peers. The strength of the principal relationship offers security so that the need for equally strong interactions elsewhere are "nice to have" but not essential. Unfortunately, the ability to overlook shortfalls in service is not long-lived and eventually will test the patience of even the loyalist of clients. So, what happens then?

Once again nothing.

Only a different kind of nothing this time. A nothing manifested in the lack of contact and instructions as the client quietly disappearance off into the sunset...

Sure the client may make some small noises to their principal relationship, but inevitably the inability of that relationship to sustain itself into the wider firm leaves the client with an unenviable choice – harsh words and a risk to a long standing relationship, even friendship, or quietly put your custom elsewhere. Little wonder so many take the easy route and vote with their feet.

The remedy? (It's not "nothing" this time)

To start, don't rely on the good work of one individual to sustain the client's relationship across the firm. Build relationships wherever the client interacts and critically measure your performance against the client's expectations. If you're not already asking your clients to evaluate their experiences of you, your firm and the people within it, then start now. This is the only way to gain a sense of your client's perceptions matched to their expectations. The understanding you gain here is invaluable and will set out a road map of actions and interactions needed to offer them a truly client centric experience that's productive, profitable and long lasting.

To end with "nothing"

Finally, look again at your client base and in particular those clients with whom you have had no contact for a considerable time and ask yourself – "have they really had no need of legal services in all this time?" Or have they gone quietly off into the sunset...