

July, 2010

WHAT CLIENTS REALLY WANT FROM THEIR LEGAL COUNSEL

In the midst of the many issues law firm leaders and consultants are addressing today – such as alternate fee arrangements, succession planning, marketing and business development – it is all too easy to overlook the many things clients really want from their legal counsel. So, as basic as it may be, here is a list.

- **Lower fees.**
- **Value.** Whatever the fee arrangement is – alternate, fixed or hourly – they want to know they got their money's worth – or even more.
- **Being asked for feedback on your work and service.** See our September, 2009 *Communique* on Client Audits.
- **Understanding of their operations and business plans.** As also discussed in our September, 2009 *Communique*.
- **Solutions to problems, i.e.,** getting them out of trouble.
- **Preventing problems, i.e.,** keeping them out of trouble.
- **Money.** Ways to save it, keep it or make it.
- **Expertise in the particular area(s) of law where they need counsel.**
- **Knowledge of, and expertise in, their industry or field.**
- **Attention.** They want to feel they are your most important client.
- **Communication.** Only bats and mushrooms like to be kept in the dark.
- **To be involved.** Being asked their opinion. Having a say in decisions.
- **Timeliness.** Meet legal deadlines but beat client deadlines.
- **To trust their lawyer.** But that's not automatic. The lawyer must earn it.
- **Courtesy and respect.** To be treated as a person, not just a file. This applies to all client personnel, not just the legal department.
- **No surprises.** Tell them what will happen and prepare them for what might happen. Also, don't exceed the agreed upon or projected fee without their approval.
- **Prompt and understandable billing.** This helps them plan their cash flow. Furthermore, their memory is fresh on what you and the firm have done. A wise managing partner once said, "Bill promptly, while the glow of appreciation still shines in the client's eyes."

- **Prompt answers.** To their questions – and to any complaints.
- **Guidance and counsel.** On what they must or should do. They can't read your mind.
- **Responsiveness.** Remember, regardless of what you think, if the client feels something is important, then it is important.
- **Advocacy.** Never forget that you were retained to represent their interests.
- **A deal maker, not a deal breaker.** The magic words to a client are, “Yes, if . . .” and “No, but . . .”
- **Follow through.** Always do what you say you will do – and when you say you will do it.
- **To know that there is back-up and depth behind you.** Long Rangers scare clients.
- **Non-billable time.** If the fee is based on the billable hour, they don't like to feel that the meter is always running, particularly on short phone calls.

Remember, there are other good lawyers and firms who can do what you and your firm can do. What distinguishes some lawyers and firms from others, and therefore makes them successful, is that they realize what their clients really want – and they give it to them.

Robert Denney Associates provides management, marketing and strategic planning guidance to law firms and businesses throughout the United States and parts of Canada. Reports and discussions of timely issues, as well as recent Legal and Corporate Communiques, are posted on our web site, www.robertdenney.com.

