

Focus on Clients

By [Silvia L. Coulter](#) on April 19, 2013

Every once in a while we get reminded of how important client service really is, particularly for those of us in the service business. We work hard, long hours and believe we always think of clients first. I was speaking with a general counsel over lunch the other day and he said,

When I practiced law (at a large firm) I thought I was very focused on my clients. Since I've been a general counsel, going on more than ten years now, I realize there were some things I could have done better.

I'm sure that's how two of our clients feel who each just lost a multi-million dollar client to a competitor. Each firm had these client relationships for more than 15 years. We suggest it's always about the basics—and keeping in touch to build the relationship is basic for sure.

We all hear client/GC panelists talk about the outside counsel/in house counsel relationships and what could be better. Perhaps a short list of things to do—regardless of how well you believe you are liked or if you think your client is too busy to be bothered with client feedback meetings, etc.—will be helpful to strengthen your/your firm's client relationships.

Spend time focusing on the relationship. Ask relationship-building questions. It might be that there is a lot of interaction between the client and the partner(s) on a regular basis but this usually pertains to the legal work not the relationship. Focus on the relationship and what's important to the client. Don't assume you know. We've seen far too many instances where the best clients have left their firms for reasons that should not have happened and they are all relationship-oriented.

Be proactive about aligning with the clients' business goals. If the client is trying to achieve cost-containment goals, hire a consultant to teach a project management workshop and invite the client. Or discuss other ways the client envisions cost-cutting. They have good ideas and your firm can benefit from hearing what other firms are discussing with the client.

Ask for feedback on a regular basis. Clients welcome the conversation and firms will greatly benefit from the same. A recent law firm client told us the GC of a significant organization is too busy to have these kinds of meetings and the firm is well thought of and gets most of their work. When the GC was approached for a client feedback meeting, she said she thought the firm took the business for granted and they never ask to meet with her. Needless to say the MP was out there the next day which she very much appreciated. Inviting clients to team meetings is another way to confirm to them that their opinion matters greatly.

Try these few things to open up dialog and align with clients and reap the rewards.