

Client Complaints about YOU

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12 Things that Irritate Clients Most

The relationship between a client and an attorney is a delicate one.

Drop the ball even once and the relationship could be ruined forever.

So, what are the most common deal-breaking habits?

According to Reid Trautz and Dan Pinnington, authors of *The Busy Lawyer's Guide to Success*, here are twelve things that annoy clients most.

1. Sending a very large bill without warning or explanation.

This scenario calls for an in-person meeting to explain the charges to the client.

Better yet, avoid it altogether with a strict retainer policy that requires a sufficient retainer at the start of a matter, regular or milestone billing, and a retainer replenishment at each step along the way.

2. Dropping names to impress others.

While it can be good marketing to let potential clients know of your past successes, most clients are far more concerned about their needs, not your otherwise impressive connections.

Unless the name dropped has a direct bearing on this client's matter, save it for another time.

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3. Using too much legal jargon.

Your explanation of the impending legal process may be the model of clarity to you, but it won't be to unsophisticated and stressed clients who have worries and financial concerns.

Avoid legal jargon when explaining things to your clients, and test their comprehension by asking them to explain things back to you. Also, provide a written explanation or FAQ list that clients can take with them.

4. Not delivering on promises of performance or outcome.

Don't make promises to deliver if you cannot keep those promises. Be realistic in your assessment of what you can accomplish and by when.

To protect yourself, clearly document your advice to clients on what the expected outcome will be.

When it comes to deadlines, you can guarantee a happy client if you under-promise and over-deliver.

7. Not communicating during long periods of inactivity.

Clients always want to feel their matter is moving toward a resolution. But in litigation and other areas of law there can be long periods of inactivity as a matter of course.

Don't assume clients will understand why there is a delay. Make sure they are kept informed of the status of a matter, and when they can expect it to move forward.

8. Failing to be prepared.

Clients can tell when we are not prepared. Shuffling through papers, using the wrong names or facts, and other similar clues make clients think to themselves that they may have the wrong lawyer.

Be the *right* lawyer. Be prepared.

9. Not returning phone calls.

This is one of the most common complaints about lawyers.

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To avoid this problem, set and control client expectations at the very start of the relationship. Establish a reasonable policy on how quickly calls will be returned (e.g., within 24 hours, by the end of the next business day, or whatever is appropriate for your area of law or clients).

Inform the client of the policy, and abide by it. Set up a mechanism for staff to return calls within the established time frame if you are not available.

10. Not replying to emails.

Many clients expect virtually instant answers to email messages.

Again, set a reasonable policy on replying to emails, inform the client of that policy, and abide by it.

11. Making clients wait in the reception area.

Think about the last time you had to wait for an appointment. How did that make you feel?

Don't put your client in the same position. Get off the phone or stop whatever else you are doing if a client is waiting for a scheduled appointment.

12. Ignoring your own staff's incivility.

Stressed-out clients can be difficult to deal with, and sometimes the stress of working with difficult clients can make staff callous or rude. Remind staff about the need to keep a positive attitude and deliver consistently empathetic client service.

At the same time, listen to your staff if they complain about clients who are consistently very difficult to deal with, and do not tolerate repeated abuse to staff.

If you are guilty of any of the foregoing habits, acknowledge it to them, sincerely apologize, and make sure it doesn't happen again.

Remember, failure to deliver is not an option - ever!

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