

LawBiz® TIPS

YOUR PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PROFIT™



Week of **January 13, 2009**

Would You Accept Your Own Response?

In earlier issues of *LawBiz® Tips*, we have pointed out the importance of being available to clients when they want to reach out to you. Often it's a matter of something as simple as having your email address on your business card, or being there when the phone rings. If you don't respond to an inquiry you likely won't get hired—with well over one million lawyers in the U.S., potential clients have plenty of options to pursue.

There is an equally important corollary to this principle. Once you have the client's business, how quickly you respond will often determine how long you keep the client. My experience with entrepreneurs tells me that all businesses want more customers/clients; that's the way to increase revenue, a desired goal for most people. But when you already are doing business with someone, and you fail to respond to communications of inquiry, when you fail to keep your promises of performing at a designated time, how can you expect to receive more business from that person? How can you expect to keep that business in the future? How can you expect to get referrals from that person? You're very unlikely to get referrals, to get more business, or to get a higher share of the market from that client/customer. And you are unlikely to keep that business in the future.

Lawyers often plead that time pressures, court appearances or lack of adequate personnel to prevent a prompt response. But I know sole practitioners (literally no staff at all) who commit to respond within 90 minutes. And I know of one large Chicago firm that asserts on its web site that its lawyers will respond within two hours of a call or donate \$100 to the caller's favorite charity. In either case, what counts is the [commitment to service \(click to hear podcast\)](#).

Unresponsiveness, particularly a consistent failure to return

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Clients include attorneys, managing partners, executive directors and financial directors at small, mid-size, and large law firms. We have seen many of our clients increase their revenue by five or six figures—that's \$50,000 to \$400,000 based on reports thus far.

Many of my clients have experienced:

- Increased revenue with long-term strategies for sustainability

phone calls and respond to letters or faxes, is the number one client complaint. No matter how valid your reason for not contacting a client back quickly, including being in court, it's not a good excuse. Clients want to be assured that their matter is being dealt with. They don't want to feel ignored. If you are unable to respond personally, have a secretary, paralegal, or other lawyer ready to step in and say that you are presently unavailable and will return the call or letter by a time or date certain.

Consider these questions. Have you had dealings with vendors who fail to respond to your reasonable inquiries and requests? Have you had appointments (either with a doctor or with "the cable guy") that have kept you waiting beyond the stated appointment time? What emotions did you experience about using that service provider again? Did you actually take your business elsewhere? Now, where are you on the scale of responsiveness? Would you be satisfied waiting for your own response time? If not, ignore the problem at your own peril.

Best wishes,

Ed Poll

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What Readers Are Saying...

"I look at Ed as my business partner now—my once-a-week essential business meeting to take the pulse of my practice. During our one-hour phone conversations, we hash out the larger and smaller business challenges of my law firm. I always come away from those conversations enlarged, challenged, and sometimes even quite shaken, but with the tools necessary to move forward down the path he and I are constantly redefining for me and my firm."

-AL, Northern California