

# LawBiz® TIPS

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## How Do You Know Until You Ask?

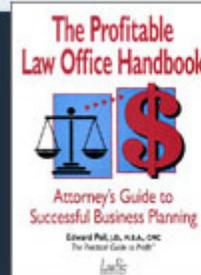
Not enough law firms ask their clients, "How am I doing?" As a result, many lawyers, unfortunately, never figure out that their client is unhappy. If they don't hear from a client after completing a matter, they just think that the client has no additional legal work. They don't realize that the client was so unhappy that, though they didn't complain, they just didn't return.

We showed in an earlier issue of *LawBiz® Tips* that sending simple, regular status reports can do much to communicate with clients and show what you as their lawyer are doing for them. Status reports address problems that arise when the client doesn't understand what you accomplished, and refuses to pay the bill when it comes due. However, status reports only convey information *from* the lawyer *to* the client. Far more important for maintaining the lawyer-client relationship is to find out what clients themselves think.

For years, the main tool for doing this has been one that many lawyers dread using: a written client survey form. Most lawyers are reluctant to ask the questions. They're afraid of the answers—but what better result could you get than to be told there is something that you can correct and, thereby, strengthen the relationship when you do? The client feels appreciated and heard...and recognizes that you care enough to ask and to make a change.

Too often, marketing gurus suggest that written surveys be sent in the mail after a matter or litigation is concluded. I suggest that this is the wrong time. No matter what you learn from the responses (and in my experience, you won't get many responses, probably not even a statistically valid amount), it's after the fact. That means that you will not be able to salvage that client relationship if there is real dissatisfaction. One of my clients taught me an important lesson: send a short survey with the first billing. If there is anything wrong, it's best to know at the beginning when you have time to correct any deficiency.

In larger firms, we concluded that it is very beneficial for the managing partner to periodically visit the top 10 clients of the firm. Even when I was in industry, the fact that I, as CEO,



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cared enough to visit a customer had a dramatic impact on our relationship and the buyer's/customer's goodwill toward us. Such a visit doesn't have to be an elaborate production. Simply meet clients over coffee and ask, "How am I doing? Should I be doing something differently? Is there an issue that concerns you? Does my staff treat you courteously?" Given this opportunity, clients generally will provide you with honest answers—and if there's a problem, it's better to know now than when there's an unpaid bill or a disciplinary charge against you.

## Personal Commentary

The stage is set: we now know who our candidates will be for the national election, and Labor Day is the "kick-off" for the stretch run. If you're in one of the 18 "in play" states, watch out. You will be inundated with commercials, the likes of which you probably have never seen before.

The real issue for all candidates will be what "value" they offer the voting public. Not values, but value. What will be their expectations and goals if elected? What will they do to address the concerns of the American and, yes, world population? This should be an issues campaign, not a personality campaign.

Let's hope it works out to be just that. Then, and only then, will we know the intended course for the next 4 years.

As an aside, I hope you read my blog posts at [www.lawbizblog.com](http://www.lawbizblog.com) concerning the "gaming" of the system by certain law school deans. While understandable, it is a shame that at the same time that our national candidates seek to raise the bar of discussion away from personal attacks and toward issues discussions, the very teachers of our future lawyers and leaders of this country are shown to be lowering the moral and ethical standards of our profession.

Best wishes,

Ed Poll

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## What Readers Are Saying...

### Keynote speech is the "highlight" of Bar Association training seminar

"Ed's presentation, in my opinion, was the highlight of this series of speakers. I found the information which was presented to be tremendously valuable. Further, it was presented in a format which was both usable and interesting. Since Ed's presentation, I have had an opportunity to speak with several others who were in attendance and it is clear from them that he made our event successful."

*-David R. Hagen, San Fernando Valley Bar Association*