

Clients want "Concierge Services"

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When I attended the Association of Corporate Counsel meeting last month, the corporate clients were calling for law firms to offer "concierge services."

When I conduct retreats and training sessions at law firms, I generally get blank stares when I suggest that the lawyers offer "concierge services." However, one of my coaching clients in San Jose, CA, knew exactly what I was talking about.

The idea is for an expert lawyer to make himself/herself available for unlimited quick phone calls and emails to answer quick questions from clients over the phone. In the case of the San Jose lawyer, she practices in employment law and charges a flat fee so that the HR staff, management and in-house lawyers can contact her all they want. The arrangement also includes up to two hours of research and settlement negotiations -- but not litigation.

The clients love it, because they frequently need input on a decision they're about to make, but just want to run it by the firm lawyer first. They are less interested in getting a long opinion letter or extensive policy written. They just want a quick answer.

The lawyer loves it too. She gets paid a quarterly retainer -- revenue she can count on -- and the calls act as a feeder for her litigation practice for which she charges by the hour. She has set up concierge services for fast-food chains, which have lots of employee issues.

She exemplifies the new, post-recession lawyer. **The way that commerce is conducted between lawyers and clients has changed because of the recession. And the change is permanent.** If you'd like to be in practice for the next five to ten years, I highly recommend you offer concierge services too.