

Just Staying in Touch with Clients Will Result in New Files

By Larry Bodine, a business development advisor who helps law firms get new clients through business development training sessions, individual coaching and marketing strategies. He can be reached at 630.942.0977 and Lbodine@LawMarketing.com



Larry Bodine

In love, absence makes the heart grow fonder. But in law practice, it makes the client go away. By staying in regular contact (preferably face-to-face), lawyers will find that they are opening new files from the clients.

The number one complaint that clients have about their lawyers is that the lawyers don't get back to them. They don't answer their emails. They are in general unresponsive.

I know this first-hand from many of the lawyers I've worked with. That's how regional law firms capture business away from AmLaw 100 law firms.

I know of some big clients—clients that any law firm would love to have—who have switched law firms because the regional firm had a 24-hour response rule. The smaller regional firm said: "You call me; you'll get a call back or a response within 24 hours."

Client Relationships Are Under Pressure

According to the BTI Consulting Group in Boston, right now clients are more demanding than ever. In fact, 60 percent were prepared to dismiss one of their primary law firms in the near future.

The most common complaints that clients have are the following:

- "I can't get through to my lawyer,"
- "My lawyer doesn't call back,"
- "The rates are too high"
- "I can't talk to him on the phone about it."

Wouldn't it make sense at the beginning of a client relationship to ask the client a series of questions about staying in touch? The questions could include items such as the following:

- How do you want to stay in touch?
- Are you an email person?
- Would you prefer a text message?
- Would you prefer a phone call?

It's interesting that there are some clients who just live on email. They don't make phone calls. They just sit at the keyboard, send an email and expect that you've read it.

In my own practice, I've developed a habit of doing a quick search of my inbox. Because I get an average of 150 emails a day, I do a quick search every day on the names of the clients that I'm actively working with just to make sure that they haven't sent me an email.

However, there are other people who say, "Don't email me. I get too much. Here's my cell phone number. I carry it on my hip all the time. If you really need to get me, just call this number."

Lawyers Should Check E-Mail Hourly

Amazingly, fewer people are using the phone anymore. I heard a general counsel at the recent [ALFA International](#) conference say she was too impatient to listen through the voicemail message of the person she was calling. She would prefer send an email instead. In fact, I myself have received many emails from people *asking me to call them*. Use of the phone is considered a habit of "old people." It proves that the Baby Boomers are not the majority generation anymore. The majority are the Gen Xers who grew up with IM, text messaging and email.

Read the following memo issued by [A. William Urquhart](#), a partner at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart Oliver & Hedges, a 400+ lawyer business litigation firm, wrote to every lawyer in his firm:

From: A William Urquhart.
To: Attorneys.
Time: 9:21 a.m.
Re: CHECK YOUR EMAILS OFTEN

Now more than ever there are many talented lawyers and law firms competing for our business. Doing really good legal work is not enough. Clients expect that and well they should, given what we charge for our services. You must all realize that we are in a service business. In this day and age of faxes, emails, internet, etc. **clients expect you to be accessible 24\7**. Of course, that is something of an exaggeration—but not much.

LESSON NUMBER ONE: You should check your emails early and often. That not only means when you are in the office, it also means after you leave the office as well. Unless you have very good reason not to (for example when you are asleep, in court or in a tunnel), you should be checking your emails every hour. One of the last things you should do before you retire for the night is to check your email. **That is why we give you blackberries.** I can assure you that all of our clients expect you to be checking your emails often. I am not asking you to do something we do not do ourselves. I can assure you that John Quinn, Peter Calamari, Mike Carlinsky, Faith Gay, Fred Lorig, etc. all check their emails often.

Yesterday I was working with a relatively new associate on a project which both he and I knew was a rush. It was for a relatively new client whom we were trying to impress. The associate did a nice job under pressure. Before I left the office at about 7:30 I sent an email to this associate asking him to perform a task—fax a draft letter for review and comment. I assumed the task was done. Turns out the associate left the office and did not check his emails until this morning. I assumed the task had been completed. It had not been. In this case it was no harm no foul, but I think we can all imagine scenarios when this could be a disaster., and exhorts the troops to pick up the pace as far as electronic message review is concerned."

Relationships trump everything

The idea of staying in touch is to develop relationships, which is where all new business comes from. I find that the relationship will trump everything else.

Imagine you're the general counsel of a large company. You have to choose between Lawyer A and Lawyer B.

Lawyer A is a Harvard Law graduate, was on the *Law Review* and was a judicial clerk. He has a stellar record and credentials and comes from a well-respected firm.

Lawyer B muddled his way through law school, took the bar exam a couple of times and is a pretty good lawyer. He gets the job done. However, Lawyer B's kids and your kids play on the same soccer team. As a matter of fact, he's had you over to dinner, and you're planning to go on vacation together. Also you visit the client's offices regularly, email new news alerts and make sure to add a personal touch to each phone call.

Guess who's going to get the call from the GC?