

20 strategies for keeping clients (happy)

By Linda Julian

1. Represent your clients well

The clients hire you for your market knowledge, for your clout, and for the fact that you will negotiate more strongly on their behalf than they can for themselves. But just doing this isn't enough - that's why there are 19 more strategies...

2. Thank clients

Don't take your clients for granted. Remember to thank your clients for their business. Do this by letter, fax, in person, and with the occasional tangible gift or lunch.

3. Return clients calls A S A P

This is a meaningful way to show your client just how important he/she is to you. If you aren't around, arrange for someone else to return the call on your behalf.

4. Keep your clients informed about their programmes or placements

Your clients have every confidence in your ability to solve their legal problems, but they feel a whole lot more comfortable and secure when you keep them informed frequently and regularly throughout the process.

5. Ask clients what they expect, then do it

You'll never be absolutely certain that you are going to please a client unless you ask them exactly what they do expect, and then act on it.

6. Be completely discreet and loyal

Make it abundantly clear to your clients that you respect the confidentiality and commercial sensitivity of the information you come across. Reassure them on this point. Be loyal to your client: whatever you think of their behaviour, remember that - in the end they are paying the bill, and that without them, you wouldn't have job.

7. Be creative and innovative

Clients want your bright, new ideas. They want you to show leadership. Use all the creativity you can muster to come up with innovative solutions to client problems.

8. Be really involved in your client's industry - for example, the insurance industry

Make sure you really know what's going on. Be apart of the "bigger picture" of the industry - not just by socialising with other insurance or re-insurance people, but by participating in conferences, discussion groups, industry bodies, and educational activities. Read the industry press.

9. Constantly seek feedback

Always ask your client how you are going. Ask clients how you can do better. And listen to what they have to say.

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10. Get to know your clients business

Show a genuine and sincere interest in client companies. Read their annual reports, internal magazines, and staff newsletters. Watch for their names in the press. Talk about your clients company, and its activities, with their people.

11. Help your client train their personnel

Help your contacts to do a better job. Help your clients to train their staff to do a better job. Offer any education or guidance that you can.

12. Be available after hours

Give your clients home and mobile contact numbers so they can get in touch in a crisis. Be available for early morning or early evening meetings with clients - if that's what they want.

13. Be flexible

Try to do things the way clients want, rather than the way that is convenient to you. Adopt your client's terminology, wherever feasible. Become more flexible and easier to deal with than any of their other advisors, especially other lawyers.

14. Meet with other client advisors

Always be ready to join forces with other advisors to your client to get the best solution for them. In the interests of your client be prepared to form genuine multi-disciplinary working partnerships with other experts.

15. Introduce your clients to other products and services which will be helpful to them

If you come across something that's really great, and could be of benefit to your client - even if its miles away from your professional engagement - tell your clients about it. This always goes down well.

16. Help you clients to network

Introduce your clients to other contacts in the industry, or other expert service providers who could be helpful to your client. Most of all, if you can spot a business opportunity for a client, point them in that direction. This earns lots of brownie points.

17. Provide a constant stream of relevant information to your clients

Through all of the independent surveys, and all of the research with your clients, everything points to your client placing a high value on relevant information. Keep up the information flow. Remember, you'll get extra points for brevity!

18. Publicise your clients' news within your firm and your networks

When one of your clients has a big win, or when there is an important new appointment at a client, publicise it within your practice and throughout your network. Make sure everybody knows about the new market your client is entering, about their recent acquisition, or whatever else is important to the client. And, give your client a copy of what you have circulated in the group, or tell them about it.

19. Keep your client informed of what's happening within your firm

Your clients are interested in what's happening within your firm. Do your best to keep them abreast of who's who, and initiatives within your group.

20. Care about your clients

There is no substitute for genuine concern and a sincere interest in your client. If you don't care, it will show. If you do, it makes all the difference.

About the author

Linda Julian is acknowledged as a leading authority on strategic practice development and how to win business for law firms. Since 1979, she has consulted with lawyers and other professionals throughout Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, and Asia on a wide range of business acquisition, client retention, and strategic management issues.

Her book *The Passionate Professional: creating value, success, and prosperity* has sold in 13 countries and has received wide acclaim. Linda lectures in strategic management and marketing professional services at post-graduate level. She leads the small and highly specialised Julian Midwinter & Associates consulting practice.