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# Daily Journal

## EXTRA

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## Building Client Loyalty

Appropriate Techniques for Revealing Personal Qualities

by **Robert N. Kohn and Jeffrey Miiller**

In today's competitive and rapidly changing business environment, client loyalty is more important than ever. Client loyalty helps keep the competition away. It stimulates more work. It makes clients feel better about paying your fees. It helps save relationships in the event of a client take-over. It motivates your contacts to go to bat for you in the event your relationship is being re-evaluated. And, it increases the likelihood that your contacts will take you with them as they grow or move in their careers.

While the benefits of building client loyalty are significant, the obstacles can seem overwhelming. For example, a lawyer in one of our client relations workshops made the following comment: "My clients don't want to be taken to lunch, or ball games. They just want me to do the work. And, anything else beyond that is perceived by them as a transparent sales effort which they resent."

This lawyer was expressing two sentiments which are common among lawyers. The first sentiment is the belief that "Doing good work," is the only appropriate method for marketing to clients. The problem with this belief is that there are thousands of lawyers across the country who do

good work. And, while we agree that good work is necessary to build client loyalty, it is imperative to find strategies for differentiating yourself from the competition. Otherwise, you have no real financial security in your practice. Unless you practice in a highly specialized area of the law, your legal services are fungible.

The second sentiment being expressed is that selling is distasteful and inappropriate. For many lawyers, selling feels pushy, manipulative and greedy. It can lead to feelings of rejection and embarrassment. And, it may offend some clients, ruining those relationships.

While it is true that there are salespeople who use inappropriate tactics, the fact is that selling in and of itself is not inappropriate. Your goal in building client loyalty is to identify selling techniques that are honorable and appropriate for you.

There is a fundamental strategy that we teach for building client loyalty that is both honorable and appropriate. The strategy is to reveal your positive personal qualities. We believe that people do business with the people they know and like. As clients learn more about your positive personal qualities, they develop a greater feeling of pride, comfort and loyalty in working with you.

## **List the personal qualities you want to reveal**

The first step in revealing your personal qualities is to write them down. In our client relations workshops, we have lawyers write down the personal qualities they are proud of. Here is a sample of personal qualities they have identified.

Knowledgeable  
Experienced  
Creative  
Loyal  
Trustworthy  
Empathic  
Organized

Once you know what your qualities are, you are ready to develop some techniques for communicating them to your clients.

## **Give Added Value**

One honorable and appropriate technique for revealing many of your personal qualities is to give added value. Here are three categories of added value.

### **1. Education**

One of the most effective techniques for building client loyalty is education. Some forms of education include public speaking, teaching and seminars. Clients appreciate it when you invite them to seminars. They also appreciate you going to their sites to do seminars for their employees.

Another form of education is writing articles. We recommend that you write articles which give tips on how your clients can improve their businesses. You can then get your articles published and send them to your clients. In educating your clients, you not only provide useful information, but you reveal important qualities about yourself such as knowledge and experience.

### **2. Entertainment**

One of the easiest and most common techniques for building relationships is to take your clients to lunch. If they don't want to go to lunch, as was mentioned in the earlier example, try to find something else they would enjoy. Engage them in conversation and listen for opportunities. For example, if in the course of conversation they say they just got back from a vacation, find out where they went and what they did. You might find out that you share similar interests. Even if you don't share interests, they might mention something that you would like to try.

Or, you could invite clients to participate in activities that you enjoy. One of our clients takes his family and his clients' families to the circus. Another lawyer we know invites her clients to musical soirees in her home. Another one of our clients regularly throws theme parties. Entertaining is fun and it can reveal qualities you may have such as creativity and depth of character.

### **3. Volunteer Work**

Another category of value is doing volunteer work. Many lawyers get involved in their communities or in charities. It is a way of helping others, and at the same time building relationships. The first step in doing volunteer work is to find the right cause. One technique is to ask your clients what charities or organizations they support. Clients are often happy to discuss their causes.

After doing some research, pick something that you care about. Most people find it extremely rewarding to contribute their time to a good cause. And, when you do volunteer work, it is an opportunity to reveal qualities about yourself such as compassion or generosity.

## **Describe your rules and procedures**

In addition to added value, you can reveal personal qualities through dialogue. One form of

dialogue is to describe the rules and procedures that guide your practice. For example, in our company we like to remind our clients that we are proud of always being on time. When we have a telephone appointment, our rule is to begin dialing 20 seconds before the appointed time. Furthermore, we use clocks that automatically reset themselves every day to the atomic clock in Boulder, Colorado. By explaining this rule to clients, it makes the point that we value accuracy and precision, and that we respect other peoples' time.

### **Use War stories**

Another technique for describing personal qualities is to tell war stories. When clients bring up a matter, instead of simply discussing your legal strategy, you could describe in depth similar experiences you've had in the past. You could reveal how passionate you are about the issue, or how tenacious you are in solving problems.

### **Describe qualities in other people**

One of the biggest obstacles in discussing your personal qualities is that it can feel like bragging. Or, it feels foolish to say something like, "I'm

empathic." But it is absolutely appropriate to talk about the qualities that you admire in your partners. You could say, "One of the things I admire about my partner is how empathic he is." When you discuss qualities that you admire in you partners, people often make the assumption that you possess the same qualities.

Building loyalty doesn't require that you behave like an obnoxious, pushy salesperson. But rather, it means learning how to express the qualities that you possess which make you a unique and valuable person. The more your clients come to learn about your personal qualities, the more they will feel a sense of loyalty and pride in working with you.

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