



Superior service keeps clients

Dear Sir,

I am a prospective client. I have a substantial need for legal services and am very particular.

I expect good service, accurate advice and value for money. I can get this from virtually any firm, anywhere, so being good at law is not enough. Delivering better service than other firms is also not enough. If I deal with your firm, I won't just compare you to other law firms. I'll compare you to all my experiences.

Let me explain. I am time-poor and will pay a premium for anything that makes my life a little easier; just look at pre-washed, organically grown mixed lettuce – I pay a massive premium for it, but to me, it is worth it.

The law should be more like my lettuce. Make it time-saving, convenient and of the best quality. This will involve always doing what you say you will and when you said you would, telling me what I need to know when (or before) I need to know it and treating my time as precious.

Show this letter to everyone in your firm because, if I am to work with your firm, I expect your people to know I matter and to deal with me in a way that makes me feel that my business matters, too.

If your firm has the ability to deliver service of this type, then I want to work with you. Call me if this is the way your firm works.

Sincerely,
Future Loyal Client

It's a cloudless day and you have a fresh mug of coffee at hand. It's time to check the snail mail – the usual selection of invitations, seminar flyers and bills. Yet there's one piece of mail that makes you think. It *really* makes you think.

Hands up how many readers would take up this offer of new business?

It's a challenge. There are firms meeting this challenge and in doing so, winning the minds, hearts – and substantial fees – of clients such as Future Loyal Client. Realistically, though, there are also firms that would back away from such a frank statement of what it takes to keep a client happy.

Smaller and medium-sized firms often meet the service challenge better than bigger and multi-site firms. This is interesting, when you consider that huge global businesses, such as Ritz Carlton, Federal Express and McDonald's have provided a consistently superior customer service experience for years.

These companies (like law firms) all

very forthcoming with suggestions about how to improve service. The challenge is listening and acting in sustainable, repeatable ways.

Hand-in-hand with the need to improve your service is the need to give your people a framework in which to make decisions. We all know how thrilling it is when we get service from an employee who has autonomy to make decisions. Every time, it beats the experience of hard and fast rules being applied, regardless of the individual circumstance.

Few law firms have the courage of the world's leading service companies to make plain what clients should expect. Because it's so unusual for law firms to do this genuinely, Cooper Grace Ward needs singling out for its courage. This Brisbane firm has its client service imperatives on its website for all to see. There are six:

■ understand our clients and their business

“CLIENTS, WHEN ASKED, ARE VERY FORTHCOMING WITH SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW TO IMPROVE SERVICE. THE CHALLENGE IS LISTENING AND ACTING IN SUSTAINABLE, REPEATABLE WAYS”

have competitors providing the same suite of services and goods. Every sector is in this situation – surrounded by competitors doing the same thing. The difference is that the likes of the Ritz Carlton, Federal Express and McDonald's have carved out a serious market position through superior service.

If hotels, courier companies and fast food chains can do it, then why can't more law firms?

The answer lies partly in the fact that these companies have done what law firms typically need to do better: use the 'show me you know me' approach to service. This approach involves gearing your people, their training, and your systems and processes, to deliver service that reflects your clients' preferences. Clients, when asked, are

- be energetic and enthusiastic
 - deliver on our commitments
 - provide commercial and practical advice and solutions
 - always keep clients informed
 - develop and enhance relationships.
- Each imperative has brief information to help clarify what it means in reality. Visit www.cgw.com.au to see for yourself.

I'd expect the folk at Cooper Grace Ward would find the challenging letter from Future Loyal Client an easy one to take up. ●

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