

The Benefits of Being an Empathetic Lawyer

The idea of being an empathetic lawyer, or at least the idea that a lawyer should show empathy when he or she is practicing law, is not exactly a new idea. [The idea of the empathetic lawyer](#) has gained prominence over the last decade as the legal industry has taken a more introspective view of how lawyers should operate, the priorities they should have and what constitutes client value.

In theory, lawyers showing empathy—defined by Dictionary.com as “the psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts or attitudes of another”—sounds well and good. But how exactly can a lawyer benefit from showing empathy?

EMPATHY CAN HELP LAWYERS PROVIDE BETTER SERVICE TO CLIENTS

Seeing the world through the eyes of clients can help lawyers and their law firms provide a level of service—and ultimately client value—that is likely to stand apart from their competitors.

The majority of individuals who are law firm clients—such as personal injury, divorce and immigration clients—are unlikely to have been law firm clients before. Because many of these individuals are engaging a lawyer for the first time, they are unlikely to have had any experience with how the legal process works. They will surely have questions, concerns or even anxiety about what they should expect until their legal issue is resolved.

A lawyer who is not empathetic to his or her clients will service clients the way the lawyer sees fit, based on nothing more than the lawyer’s own opinion of how clients should be serviced.

But a lawyer who is empathetic will build the entire client experience by standing in their client’s shoes. The lawyer will ask questions like: “What information would I want to know if I was a client?” and “How frequently would I want to be updated about my case?” By standing in the shoes of the client, the lawyer and his or her colleagues can service a client in a way that anticipates concerns and makes the client experience as frictionless as possible. This improved client service will likely lead to happier clients. Happier clients tend to leave favorable reviews and testimonials, provide strong referrals and pay their bills.

EMPATHY CAN HELP LAWYERS DELIVER BETTER RESULTS IN ADVERSARIAL SITUATIONS

Lawyers can and should show empathy to their adversaries as well. Seeing the world from an adversary’s perspective is key to understanding what exactly the other side wants to get out of a legal dispute. In addition, showing empathy to adversaries can disarm them and help dampen any ill will created by the dispute.

Armed with an understanding of what an adversary wants to get out of a legal dispute, a lawyer can better advise his or her client as to the path forward to resolution, leading to a speedier, more efficient conclusion. And because the lawyer and the client have an idea of what is most important to the adversary, the dispute may be resolved with fewer concessions on the part of the client and perhaps more concessions on the part of the adversary.

EMPATHY CAN HELP LAWYERS BE MORE EFFECTIVE MARKETERS

Lawyers can be more effective marketers by showing empathy to prospective clients and referral sources.

When a lawyer communicates to prospective clients that he or she understands what they are thinking and feeling about their legal problems, the lawyer will speak to those potential clients in a way that is likely to make the clients think that the

lawyer understands them. Such a connection establishes in the clients' minds the value the lawyer would potentially deliver and is likely to lead to at least a preliminary inquiry from a prospective client, if not a decision by the client to retain the lawyer.

But crafting such a marketing strategy is not easy for most lawyers. It takes real effort to understand the thoughts and concerns of a prospective client. Fortunately for most lawyers, the [insights they have gained from seeing the world through the eyes of their current clients](#) are likely to be equally applicable to their efforts to connect with prospective clients.

Empathy can also help lawyers increase referrals. By seeing the world through the eyes of a referring lawyer and proactively addressing any concerns that a referring lawyer might have, an empathetic lawyer can provide comfort to the referring lawyer that the case will be in good hands. Lawyers should not have much difficulty identifying and addressing these concerns given the fact that most lawyers share a similar set of concerns when they refer cases to other lawyers.

SHOWING THAT YOU CARE HAS BIG BENEFITS

Theodore Roosevelt said: "Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care." When lawyers demonstrate empathy, they are likely to find that they have become more effective lawyers and marketers and are recognized for their superior client value more often. A more effective lawyer—who also happens to be a more effective marketer—will almost certainly become a more successful lawyer.

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