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The Value of Client Value Teams

Client Experience Corner

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Clients are increasingly focused on maximizing the value they receive from their outside counsel, and they expect client-centric service, innovation, diversity, and formal client feedback processes to be engrained in their experience. Client value teams that focus solely on client service — like Troutman Pepper's client experience department — help law firms deliver on clients' expectations around value.

A recent Legal Marketing Association podcast, Making the Case for Client Value Teams*,* explores how law firms can leverage these teams to provide client-centered service. The podcast provides several useful tips and reinforces the importance of programs like Troutman Pepper Plus, our firm's standard-setting value program, for deepening and strengthening client relationships.

Here's what we learned about successful client value teams.

Clients Expect More

Clients have changed their expectations of outside counsel. They now expect and require their law firms to go beyond their immediate legal matter in adding value.

Value means different things to different clients, and outside counsel must make a concerted effort to understand their clients' businesses, what is occurring in their industries, and how they define value. Personal relationships, trust, an understanding of client objectives, and frequent and candid communication have become "must haves" for client relationships.

With these changing and varying client expectations, there is a newfound need for client value teams, which can help ensure every attorney or professional working with a client understands what that client wants and delivers a client-centered experience that aligns with those expectations.

Feedback Is Key

Successful client value efforts begin with client feedback. Feedback interviews show clients that their attorneys are invested in the relationship and care about them beyond the billable hour. Client feedback also provides insights that drive outcome-based objectives for strengthening the client relationship.

It is easy and natural for attorneys to assume that a client is happy, especially if a personal relationship exists between the client and the attorney. However, this assumption can have negative consequences over time, and attorneys may continue undesirable behaviors that make clients less likely to hire them in the future. The reality is that many attorneys do not know if their clients are sincerely happy with the relationship until they ask them.

When attorneys ask clients for feedback, clients may mask areas of dissatisfaction because of the friendly relationship that exists between them. To minimize this possibility, firms can engage their client value and experience professionals to conduct the interviews, which often results in more candor.

When deciding whom to interview, it is important to cast a wide net and try to talk to everyone at the client who touches the matter in a meaningful way. In addition to in-house attorneys and business executives, interviews should include paralegals, administrators, and junior team members. Casting this wide net provides feedback from different perspectives and makes employees at all levels of the client's business feel like they are an important part of the team. Each interviewee has the potential to be an advocate for the firm in the future, so it is beneficial to be as inclusive as possible throughout the client interview process.

While obtaining client feedback is important, acting on that feedback is even more critical. Each person interviewed reveals specific preferences, both big and small, and these preferences must be taken into consideration and translated into action. One of the primary goals of the client value team is to determine how to use client feedback to add value and advance client relationships in ways that are specific and measurable.

Client Value Teams and Workload Management

Growing pressures and demands on attorneys make them busier than ever. They cannot, and should not, do everything. Attorneys may lose sight of the importance of adding value to client relationships when faced with a massive workload.

Client value teams, like our client experience department, help relieve and manage increasing attorney demands by pooling the resources and knowledge of the attorneys across the firm who are serving the client and by leveraging the expertise of business professionals across various departments to add client value. These client value professionals keep client-centric service at the forefront of the relationship by helping attorneys connect clients with firm resources that can advance their priorities and address their pain points.

Building a Successful Client Value Team Program

Clients understand the value and benefits of having teams dedicated to client satisfaction at law firms because this is a common practice in nonlegal industries. Moreover, some clients have their own client service departments and expect their service providers to demonstrate the same outward commitment to the client experience.

Successful client value teams must be staffed by people who are excellent communicators, understanding, and empathetic. It is crucial for client value teams to learn the cultural language of both the client and the attorney and act as a "value translator" for each.

Client value teams should also be dot connectors. The team may not and will not know the answer to everything, but they should be resourceful, with a willingness and readiness to connect clients and attorneys with the people, departments, and teams inside and outside the firm that have the answer.

When it comes to scaling and institutionalizing client value teams, attorneys and clients who have benefitted from them are the best advocates. Attorneys who have benefitted from client value teams should be encouraged to share their success stories with their colleagues. And case studies that clearly explain the impact client value teams have had in very specific ways are powerful tools for demonstrating the power of these teams.

Meet Sarosha Parsons

In her role as Client Experience Coordinator, Sarosha uses her legal marketing background to provide value to clients, develop creative and innovative solutions to clients' needs, and ensure all clients receive consistently excellent service. Sarosha graduated *cum laude* from Franklin and Marshall College with a bachelor's degree in government and Spanish.

Meet Samantha Varghese

Samantha is a former Client Experience Coordinator at prior Troutman Pepper. She understands and appreciates the value and impact of client experience and hopes to display that in all her work product. Samantha graduated *cum laude* from the University of Georgia with a bachelor's degree in advertising and a certificate in entrepreneurship.