

Connecting with clients

By Linda Julian

People buy for a lot of reasons. But they have a strong propensity to buy from those they like and trust.

Even the most likeable and trustworthy lawyers sometimes benefit from a little consciousness-raising and coaching to make strong connections with prospective clients.

In most fields of practice, technically competent lawyers are in oversupply. Prospective clients select from the available talent pool on both logical and emotional grounds. Connecting strongly with clients will improve your prospects of selling your services.

Make emotional connections

Make certain that you offer both logical and emotional reasons to engage your services: help your client to like you as well as giving him/her logical grounds to defend their choice with management, colleagues, friends and family.

Use these proven techniques to establish emotional connections.

Start with a friendly and warm greeting - the character of the first few moments sets the tone for your encounter.

Use names - people respond positively to being addressed by their correct and preferred name - use it as often as feels natural and comfortable.

Make eye contact - don't let your shyness create perceptions that you're "shifty" - look clients straight in the eye (but avoid overstepping into the territory of over-controlling or intimidating eye contact).

Exude warmth through pleasant facial expressions - smile whenever appropriate.

Use appropriate body language to send signals of acceptance and "right fit".

Build emotional connections

Once emotional connections are made, here are some ideas to build on those initial connections:

Build rapport and establish an emotional bond by talking about shared experiences and shared values - we draw close to those with whom we share history, opinions, and ideas. Think about how readily we re-bond with old school friends, uni buddies, and travel companions - it's all based on our shared experiences (good and bad) and shared values.

Show your genuine interest - focus on your client so s/he knows you are genuinely interested - your sincere interest will come through (as will phoniness - to be avoided at all costs - humans have great phoniness detectors !).

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Listen intently - encourage your client to talk about his/her concerns and listen to learn - encourage elaboration on what s/he wants to achieve.

Show that you care - make sure your sincere interest and concern shines through.

Show the authentic you - avoid being false, but let the real, likable side of you come through - don't confine yourself to excessively formal behaviours (which some mistake as "professional") which stand in the way of making close personal connections.

Show your willingness to help - your client wants support with an issue which is beyond his/her own resources - leave no doubt about your willingness and readiness to help with the problem.

None of this is new, but it remains important. Work at making emotional connections with clients to fuel their desire to work with you - often too easily forgotten in the rush to "get down to business".

What clients want

I could write hundreds of words on this subject and many other well-credentialed advisers have. To put it in a nutshell, fundamentally, what clients want most is your expert passion, applied in their interests.

Our research shows they want:

- leadership - your clients are silently begging to be led and crying out for your help in solving their problems
- to be told what specific action to take in their own interests
- you to selectively sell them your services to help them with their problems
- to know what you have done for them, and want to appreciate what you have done for them
- you to educate them in the benefits you have achieved for them
- to feel they are getting something more than "just the routine treatment", and are getting "a little extra"
- you to get the ball rolling and to lead them through the process of engaging your services.

Your clients want your expertise. More than that, they want your professional passion applied in their interests.