

If I could tell you one thing . . . It would be that you should always return your clients' phone calls in a timely manner!

Article By:

Donna Bader

As an appellate attorney, I am asked to step into an existing case. That means the client has had at least one, or possibly more, attorneys assisting them before a need for an appellate attorney even existed. My primary interest – whether I represent the appellant or respondent/appellee - is if there is judicial error that justifies challenging the judgment below. When the client comes to my office, I cannot simply blurt out, “Well, tell me why you think the court committed judicial error.” Life doesn’t work that way, and as in any relationship, you have to start by building rapport and trust.

That means not only do I hear about what happened at the trial below, but how the attorney handled the case. That includes how the attorney treated the client. If the client has won the case, then the attorney may be viewed as a saint or a reincarnation of Perry Mason. The client is flush with victory and seldom has a bad word to say about his or her attorney.

The situation is quite different if the client has lost. The client is upset and confused, and is searching for a reason why he or she lost the case. It couldn’t possibly be because the jury didn’t like their facts – or maybe didn’t even like them – so there must be another reason. Was the judge on the take? Some suggest that as a reason. More often than not, the client will focus on the attorney. And sometimes, they have good reason to do so.

The client’s number one complaint – as reported by bar associations - is that the attorney simply ignored them. Didn’t write, didn’t call. Nada. And that sets the stage for the rest of their complaints. After all, how can an attorney prepare for trial if he or she doesn’t have contact with the star witness (aka the client)? And what about those times the client called with crucial information, only to be ignored by the attorney. A small mistake, that could have been forgivable if made by a trusted attorney, becomes the source of malcontent.

So, if you want to maximize your chances of success and achieving client satisfaction, build client trust and rapport, then return those phone calls. Or have your secretary do it. Or drop an e-mail. Without clients, we would be sitting around, playing “Battleship” on our computers. Treating the client as though he or she is truly important by promptly returning phone calls is a small investment that will ultimately reap rewards in client satisfaction. And clients – happy or disgruntled – will talk to their friends about their experience with you and the justice system.

National Law Review, Volume , Number 226

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