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The Business of Law Part 2: Running a Client-Centered Law Firm

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There's no limit to people in need of legal counsel at any given time. In fact, according to a [U.S. Consumer Legal Needs Survey](#), 74% of prospects searching online end up contacting a firm by phone. Is your service going to reassure them you're the right fit for their case? That's why a client-centered law firm is so important in today's world.

In a customer-centric, get-it-now world, it's no surprise the expectation for a client-centered experience at law firms has become a bigger conversation in recent years. What does it actually mean to create a meaningful client journey in today's digital environment? While you may be thinking – “of course we're client-centric at our law firm!” – this is about more than prioritizing clients or sending them an update. It's about baking client-centricity into everything you do. In day-to-day interactions, from onboarding to closing out their case, they need to know you're there for them.

In this blog, we're going to discuss ways to support a client-centered law firm in every aspect of your business, and why it's important to do so moving forward to stay competitive and profitable.

What is a Client-Centered Law Firm?

Understanding a client-centered law firm is more of a line of thought versus a single line item to check off your list. Think of a client-centered model as a shift in the way you approach processes in your firm and how it's run to be about the client in everything you do. While you may think you already do this, it's a pretty big shift when it comes to your people and technology. It's thinking about their experiences before making big decisions and adapting your technology to create a smoother, more transparent time during their case.

The purpose of a client-centered law firm, and why many firms have moved toward it, is to set themselves apart and be more competitive. In a world of thousands of attorneys in any given area,

this can be the “wow factor” that’s the difference between a client going with you vs. someone else.

What Clients Want out of a Law Firm

In the age of instant gratification brought on by same-day grocery delivery and Amazon Prime, people want what they want – and fast. Waiting for status updates by mail is no longer a feasible option to stay competitive in lieu of the internet and other legal services instantly available. People get answers right at their fingertips in seconds for their bank statements, credit cards, Uber rides, and more. That expectation has, by proxy, bled into the legal industry, creating the need for a client-centered law firm.

Think of yourself as a customer for a moment. You expect ongoing communication and respect. You want to be treated like an equal. Apply those same principles to your legal services, and you’ll check all the boxes of what a client is looking for. Most times, clients are under duress and are coming to you for guidance and help. Rather than being callous or pristine, show them they’re heard and actively listen. After all, they know their case best. As an attorney, that initial contact via phone or in-person can make all the difference in whether they choose to hire you or not. The same can be said for your staff.

So, this all seems great in theory, but how exactly can this get implemented in between all the bustle of daily operations?

Implementing a Client-Centered Law Firm

The most effective way to implement a client-centered law firm is to zoom out and see the entire journey of a case from the client’s perspective. Running through this from start to finish can identify where you may have gaps or get muddy in terms of the communication and mindfulness we previously mentioned.

Here are a few tips to help:

Design a Client Journey

From the origin of a client’s legal issue to paying their bill at the end, your client’s journey is

defined as every step of their case from their perspective. There's usually a substantial difference between what you see of their case and what they're experiencing and living while everything is unfolding.



Is there a workflow anywhere in your legal tech outlining the client's journey? This can be a great starting point to help you assess where there may be shortcomings or delays.

Refining the Customer Experience

No law firm is perfect – there are always ways to run a client-centered firm and improve upon existing processes. While it may never feel like the “right time,” consider blocking out an hour a week to push aside distractions and focus solely on putting yourself in your client’s shoes. Over time, this can create massive improvements in their experience or all the touchpoints concerning their case.

To refine your customer experience, ask yourself a few questions about your firm, such as:

- Are billing cycles timely and easy to understand?
- What are the areas of improvement in the onboarding process?
- Where are the steps clients feel the most dissatisfied, and why?
- What gaps do your team see? Have you asked them about possible solutions?

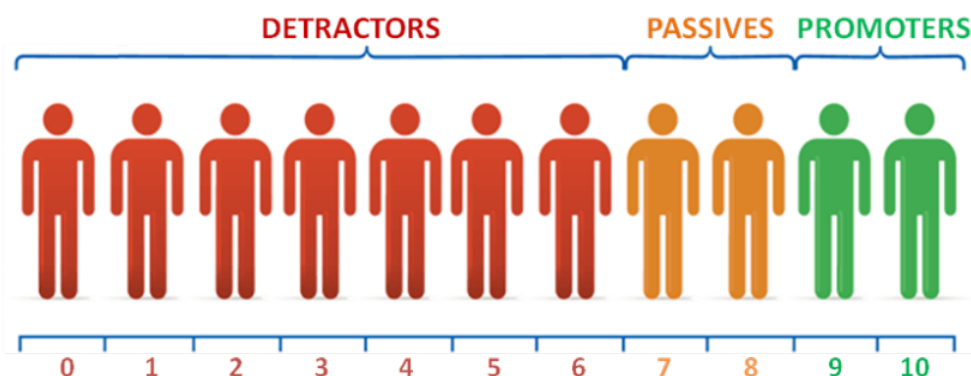
- Do you have a bank of commonly asked questions from clients? Where can these be implemented to help ease their worries?

Smoothing out the process can boost satisfaction and faith in the process itself.

Tracking Your Client's Customer Satisfaction

You can implement everything you want to help clients, but if there's no way to measure success or gauge satisfaction, you might as well be working blind. Using a Net Promoter Score (NPS) to measure customer satisfaction can be invaluable if you're stuck in the previous step of "I don't know what I don't know."

For clarity, a quick survey or matrix can be 3-5 questions asking for recommendations and a 1-10 sliding scale for satisfaction. Finding the average of responses, and measuring this over time, can give you a KPI on how a client-centered approach is moving the needle.



Courtesy of Medium.com

Running and Maintaining a Client-Centered Law Firm

Now you know why client-centered law firms stay competitive and are an important part of the changing landscape in the legal industry. Now you need to know the actual structure and pieces

needed for it to work: the people and technology aspect. After the plan and big picture, steps are in place, now it's about running and maintaining the system. It takes a strong, communicative team to make it all happen, so remember – how you treat your team will reflect and trickle down into how clients are treated.

Ask for Feedback Regularly

Isolating your thoughts can quickly become an echo chamber. If you're a managing partner or attorney, be sure to ask for feedback from your other employees regularly since you're not on the ground level working with clients most of the time. Every month or quarter, send your employees a survey or meet (digitally or otherwise) to hear their thoughts. Chances are, they've been itching for an opportunity to voice concerns, especially when the day-to-day can take over.

Put the Client at the Forefront of Your Business Process Decisions

It's easy to have short-sightedness when it comes to goals – everyone wants the low-hanging fruit and the small wins to come quickly. But that won't help when clients feel unheard, or you're not able to return calls and help increase onboarding as goals, for example.

Building a client-centered firm means always thinking “how does this affect the client?” first and foremost will help keep them top of mind when it comes to the customer journey. Tie that into its own KPI, or verbal note during every budget meeting. Have a few minutes baked in for suggestions and ways things can be improved.

Go Above and Beyond Meeting Your Client's Needs

When it comes to client centricity, as you've learned, they're at the core of every business process and decision. That means during in-person meetings, make them feel comfortable and, if possible, carve out extra time in case you need to listen to clients for longer than the allotted time. These little gestures can show you're committed to going above and beyond them long after they've signed the dotted line.

The legal industry, at its heart, is a people business, built on helping others and bringing to justice for those who have been wronged. Remind them of that with every update and movement of assistance you provide.

Leverage Modern Law Firm Technologies to Deliver Exceptional Service

This may feel daunting like there's never enough time in a day to get it all done. We get it. That's why many firms have turned to practice management software to do some of the legwork for them. By using expedited billing and workflow automation, you can get minutes back in everyone's workday that adds up to something incredible: the ability to offer exceptional service to your clients.

- **Secure client communication:** A 24/7 portal keeps clients updated on their case.
- **Process credit cards instantly:** 40% of consumers would never hire a lawyer who didn't take credit or debit. Don't cheat your firm out of extra business by accepting payments faster.
- **Route approvals with automation:** workflows ensure everyone gets eyes on necessary documentation, so there's no more paper trail that's lost in the shuffle.

Centerbase can do all of the above and more for your firm.

A Client-Centered Law Firm Benefits Everyone

To recap, by mapping your client journey – or their perspective of a case from inception to their last bill payment – you can stay competitive and create a positive reputation that earns more referrals and business. By keeping an open line of communication between your staff and clients and rating the satisfaction over time, you can pave the way for a truly immersive, client-centered experience in all your big business decisions. How's that for staying competitive in a digital, software-dominated industry? Staying profitable and efficient are the two hallmarks of a client-centered experience that all work together to bolster success

Staying efficient with updated software can give you the secret sauce to ensure all of it happens every day. If you're interested in learning more, feel free to contact us or read our resources library for more about how Centerbase can change the game for your firm.

If you missed it, check out part 1 to this blog, [The Business of Law Part 1: In the Age of the Consumer](#).

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