

# Because you're worth it

## How to build client appreciation of your work

*If your clients realise the work needed to resolve their matter, they will appreciate your efforts and be less likely to resent paying the bill. Giles Watson presents valuable tips for improving client appreciation.*

### It's great to feel appreciated.

To not only know that you have helped someone, but also to see and hear them recognise your talents and appreciate your efforts is personally rewarding and vital to maintaining personal morale and wellbeing. It is also critical for practice success and profitability.

Too often, clients do not recognise the true value in legal work and do not appreciate the efforts of their solicitors. This can lead to legal services being seen as 'grudge' purchases, cost disputes, downward pressure on fees, client resentment and an unrewarding experience for all.

It shouldn't be like this. Generally, clients do not automatically understand the complexities and value of legal work and should not be expected to – it is up to the solicitor to build their understanding.

Instead of grumbling or resenting a lack of client appreciation, solicitors should work on their communication skills so they can explain their work in a way that ensures clients do recognise the value in their efforts.

Building client recognition of the value of your work not only helps clients appreciate you more, it also makes it easier for you to record and bill more of your time because you are confident clients will recognise the value-boosting productivity, recovery and profitability.

So, how can you build the client's appreciation of your work? Here are some tips:

### Understand what the client values

Before you can get the client to recognise the value in the work, you need to understand what the client's needs are, and what they value. Take a few extra minutes in any initial interview to discuss not just the immediate legal challenge but the broader business / personal challenge and what this means for the way you handle or talk about the work.

Look for value triggers by remembering the 'TERMS' model: Time / Emotion / Risk / Money / Situation. Can you help save the client time, stress, risk or money? Will they value this?

### Build the pain

Legal services typically involve removing some risk or providing a solution to some problem. To help build the client's appreciation of your services, it first helps to build the significance of the initial challenge. The more 'pain' the client feels, the more they need and will value a solution. Ask the client questions to 'build the pain' and thus build the value of your solution:

- What if you did nothing?
- What would the impact be if you (we?) couldn't resolve this issue?
- What if this project failed?
- What will you be able to do that you can't do now?
- What would the risk be to your reputation?

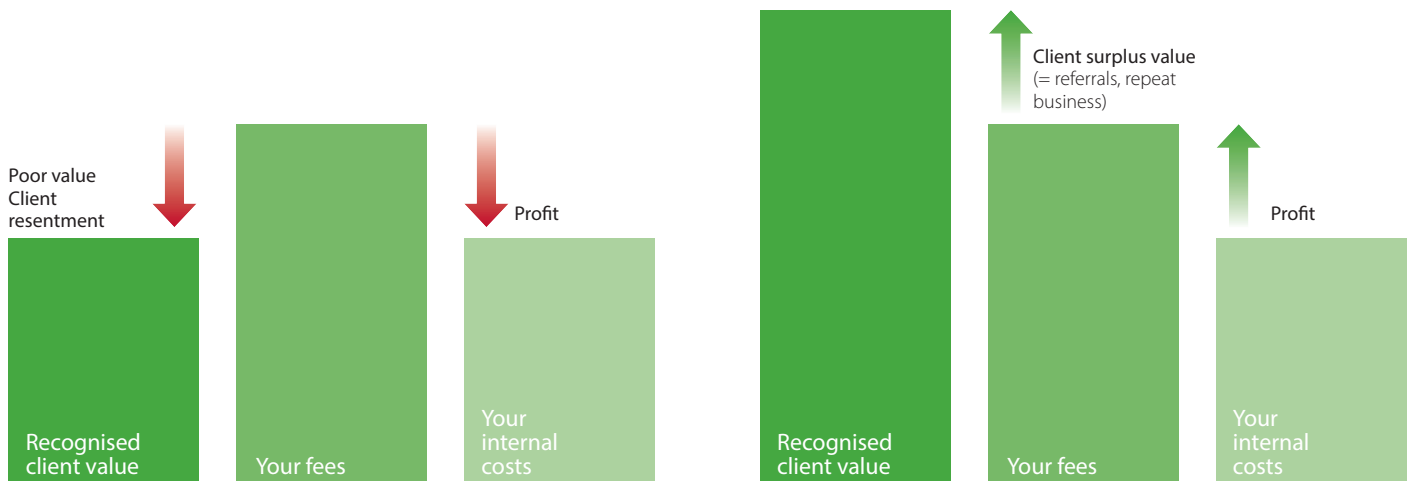


Chart 1: The legal services 'grudge' purchase

Chart 2: The satisfied customer

### Communicate value

Explain how your services can resolve, reduce, control or compensate for the client's threat, injury, anxiety, risk or other pain. Explain:

- what you will be doing
- why you will be doing it
- why you will do it *this way*
- the risks (to the client) of not doing different tasks
- how the activity will benefit the client (in terms of their needs).

Do this throughout the matter – in initial interviews, cost updates, time recording narratives, matter updates, ongoing discussions and in the bill. Before you send the bill, ring the client to explain what you've achieved for them. Get them to focus on the value of your work, rather than the cost.

### Highlight competitive advantages

Understand where and why you are better than your competitors and link these advantages back to your client's needs. Give them a reason to feel good about choosing you. Wherever possible *demonstrate* your advantages in terms of service or expertise, instead of merely claiming you are better.

As an example, if your client has concerns about the costs of legal work and values control over costs, demonstrate your advantage by providing more information/flexibility. Alternatively, if you have an advantage in terms of experience or expertise, demonstrate this in the way you discuss the matter.

### Develop value propositions

Many solicitors or practices have developed an overall value proposition – a clear summary of the benefits and value a client can expect from you and your services. You can build

on this by developing a number of alternative value propositions depending on the matter or differing client needs. If you come up with a good one, such as 'we will keep you in control of costs', refer to it throughout the matter (costs agreement, updates, bills). In addition to reinforcing your value to one client, it will also give them a 'top of head' phrase that they can use when referring others to you.

### Believe in your value

Never apologise or be defensive about your fees. If you do not believe you are worth \$x an hour, your client never will. State your fees confidently to show you believe that these demonstrate good value (because you're worth it).

*Giles Watson is Queensland Law Society practice support manager. On Thursday 13 June, he will facilitate a half-day 'Essentials' workshop on personal productivity and client skills for early career lawyers.*

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