

Listen to Your Clients

By Kate Costello

• *From Page 13*

physician who, when addressing a graduate class at an American medical school, advised the graduates that the keys to success in order of priority were:

- availability
- affability
- ability

Clients want to deal with people who care. This is true regardless of whether the client is embroiled in a family law dispute or is the group managing director of a corporate conglomerate.

• *Communicate regularly with clients.*

During the course of a matter, communicate at regular intervals so that the client understands that the matter is progressing although there may be no other outward manifestation of that fact.

The cardinal rule is to return phone calls. If you can't manage to do anything else, do this, on the same day (or get a secretary to phone back at the end of the day to explain that you have been unable to return the call, giving a reason, and the time you will get back to the client) and you will be successful.

• *Communicate in your clients' vocabulary.*

Have you ever sat in a meeting as a new committee member where the "old" hands speak in acronyms universally understood, except apparently by you? If so, do you remember how this secret terminology made you feel — awkward and ignorant? The same is true for clients whose lawyers forget, in their familiarity with the profession and the practice area, that clients don't have the benefit of years of practice and a knowledge of the legal system and can't, therefore, comprehend a

learned treatise or technical explanation of the solution to a legal problem. I remember once being privy to what I considered a superlative expose of a point of law given by a senior practitioner to a sophisticated commercial client. On conclusion, the client, responded simply: "Yeah, well I am sure that's fascinating but what I want to know is can I do it or can't I?" Which leads to the final point ...

• *Provide solutions.*

During the course of acting for a client on a particular matter it may become evident that the client's modus operandi, standard documentation etc. are deficient in a way that may give rise to future legal problems even after the immediate issue is resolved. If so, the practitioner should advise the client of wider implications and suggest a remedial course of action. Similarly, a lawyer advising a client that it is not possible to do what the client wishes, should look to understand, more comprehensively, the context of the client's request in order to achieve the desired result by some other means, if possible. Reactive roles are not acceptable for legal service providers.

The Final Injunctive

If you have listened, really listened, to your clients you will already be providing professional services which accord with these characteristics. If not, if you still believe the position of legal practitioner is an exalted one which entitles you to ignore the demands of a changing business environment and a more demanding and discerning client base, you might do well to remember the lesson of evolution — adapt or perish.

Kate Costello holds a law degree, is a marketing and training consultant to the professional service sector and principal of Costello Consulting, 282 Gilbert Street, Adelaide, Ph (08) 2318165.

Details wanted for directory

Northern Territory lawyers are being invited to submit a complimentary listing of their practice details in the 1994/95 edition of the **International Directory of Advocates & Lawyers**.

This directory is being compiled by Point to Point Publishing in London, England.

It will be circulated in more than 120 countries and is due to be published on 1 October, 1994.

Lawyers' practice details, including name, postal address, telephone and facsimile numbers will be inserted free of charge, while specialisations, languages and other details can be included for a nominal cost.

Lawyers who would like to be included in the directory should write to Henry Forbes-Wilson, 22 Shrewsbury Mews, Chepstow Road, London W2 5PN, United Kingdom.

How to use Halsbury's

Practitioners now have access to a comprehensive package on Halsbury's Laws.

The package — comprising a video, student manual and tutor's notes — is a joint production of the University of Central Lancashire and Clear Image Video Production.

Among other things, the package explains step by step how to use the encyclopaedia to help solve legal problems and provides a complete "off the shelf" training program which can be incorporated in a training scheme.

Meanwhile, the accompanying video shows the overall structure of the encyclopaedia, how to use the subject index and the purpose of the annual abridgements and indexes to cases statutes.

The Law Society will send practitioners an order form on request. Call 81 5104.