



CORDELL PARVIN

# Client Service

## What it is

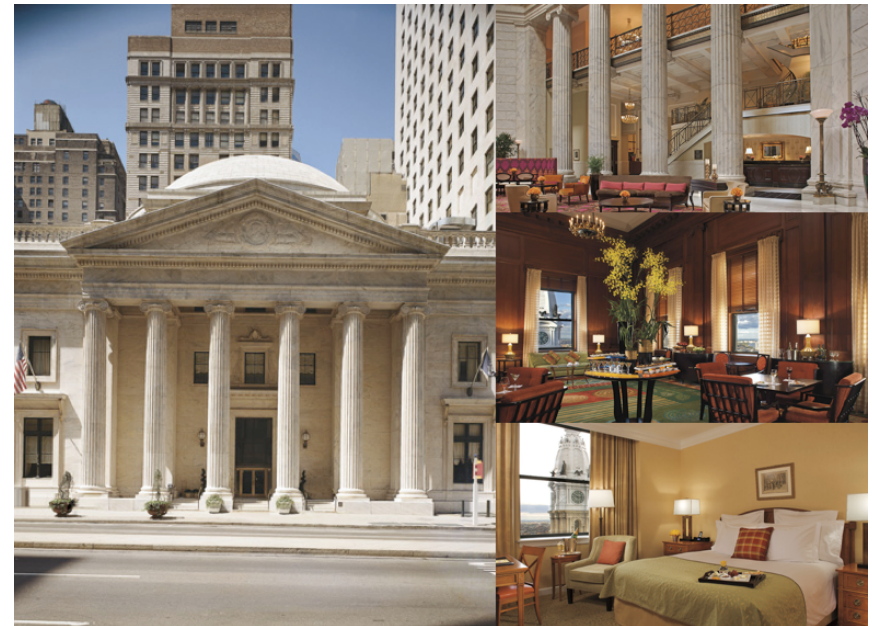
I like to talk about client service and how it can make a huge difference in a world where legal expertise is assumed. What does extraordinary client service mean? How does it compare with service that is only average?

I find I learn about client service from my own experiences as a customer. You probably do also. Let me share with you two hotel experiences. I stayed at a hotel in Las Vegas. I won't identify it by name, but will tell you that it is on Flamingo near office buildings on Howard Hughes. Because it was originally built as a condominium project it does not have a casino and is small enough to only need one person working at the front desk.

After I finished my work I went back to the hotel. My return flight to Dallas was leaving at 6:00 am the next morning and in Las Vegas getting through security can take some time even that early. As a result I wanted to print my boarding pass at the hotel. When I asked the front desk clerk she said I could print it in the business center. I asked if there would be a

charge and she said there would be. (I have a thing about paying to print my boarding pass. I plan to go through life and never pay to print my boarding pass.) There was no one other than me in the lobby so I asked if she could possibly print my boarding pass. She replied that she could not. I was quite surprised and told her to leave a note for the general manager letting him or her know that I will never stay at their hotel property again.

The next morning I woke up at 4:00 am and after getting ready I went downstairs to check out. There was a young man working at the front desk and he asked how I liked my stay. I told him everything was fine, except for his colleague refusing to print my boarding pass. He got my flight information and printed the boarding pass in less than one minute.



Not long after that experience, I stayed at the **Ritz Carlton in Philadelphia**. The firm for whom I was working was having their partner's retreat there. When I checked in I asked how much more it would cost to stay on the Club Level and decided I would pay the extra money out of my pocket because I prefer eating there when I am by myself and I appreciate the service. When I reached the Club Level, I recognized the night manager from a previous stay. John greeted me: He said: "Welcome back Mr. Parvin, where have you been? I haven't seen you here for about a year. Is Mrs. Parvin with you on this trip?" I was blown away that John either remembered me or within the very short time I was on the elevator he went into the computer to find out when I was last there and that my wife Nancy was with me. Later, John asked if I had any special requests. I had torn my trouser pocket when it got caught on my airline seat reclining tab during flight. John took care of getting it repaired for me.

I am a loyal Ritz Carlton customer. I am willing to pay more to stay at Ritz Carlton hotels and I am willing to pay even more to stay on the Club Level. When I got home from this trip, I bought the book: "*The New Gold Standard*" by Joseph A. Michelli. I think I know from experience why Ritz Carlton service is extraordinary, but I want to better understand how they do it and how a law firm could set the new gold standard for client service.

## What My Clients Told Me

How many times have you been told that to differentiate your firm you need to "add value?"

Have you ever asked your clients for suggestions on ways you can add value? I did. I asked: "What is most effective way we can, at our expense, invest in our relationship with you?" Here is what they told me.

GC Client 1: Provide memos explaining new court cases/laws/regulations that would affect our business.

GC Client 2: Don't charge for learning about our company.

GC Client 3: Willingness to help train, share forms and answer simple questions without opening a file and recording time.

GC Client 4: Meet with us at your expense and find out what we need.

GC Client 5: Coming back after completion of a project and sharing with us any lessons learned and asking for our feedback.



I do not think there is anything unexpected in these responses. Try implementing them with your clients.

## What Are You Doing for Your Clients?

In a crowded legal market it is hard for a lawyer or law firm to distinguish herself or itself from other equally talented lawyers and law firms. If you are looking for ways to do it, think about what other businesses are doing.

*In Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?*, Seth Godin says that Hyatt Hotels is now treating their best customers differently. They are not seeking to charge them more. Instead, they are randomly covering bar tabs, giving free massages and providing other services for which there is normally a charge.

Hyatt isn't the only hotel that provides unexpected things to its best customers. In Chapter 2, I mention how I was treated at The Peninsula Beverly Hills.

In March 2010 I stayed at the Ritz Carlton in Philadelphia. The people who work there know I am a big Starbucks coffee drinker. When I arrived in my room I found a basket of Starbucks goodies including a mug, Via instant coffee, a Starbucks card and espresso chocolate candy. This was the second



time a Ritz Carlton hotel had given me Starbucks goodies. Fashion Law lawyer [Staci Riordan](#) wrote about her pillow experience at the Philadelphia Ritz Carlton in her blog "[Puttin' on the Ritz.](#)"

Even though staying at the Ritz Carlton is different than working with a lawyer and law firm, I still believe unexpected extra service can set you and your law firm apart. Staci and I wrote about our Ritz Carlton experiences because we never expected the extra service. Your clients will tell others about you and your firm when you provide that unexpected extra service.



Are you trying to charge more and cross-sell your very best clients, or are you providing extra, unexpected service at no charge? When was the last time you did something that would normally be billable and simply did not charge for it?

# Client Service

## Why Focus on It

### Stand Out from the Crowd

I recently reviewed several law firm Web sites for their sections on client service. Almost without exception, law firms claimed to provide value to their clients, understand their clients' needs, and deliver high-quality, cost-effective, and responsive services. If firms are actually following through with the commitments they make on their Web sites, clients should be very loyal. Evidence suggests that many firms are not putting their online words into offline action.

Every BTI Consulting Group study of corporate counsel at Fortune 1000 companies shows that clients are largely dissatisfied with their outside law firms. Of the corporate counsel included in the study, 75.3 percent did not recommend their primary law firms to other companies. While they wouldn't say their law firms are bad, they just don't believe they're very good. As one corporate counsel put it, "They (the primary law firms) do just enough to enable us to barely tolerate the service levels."



Can you imagine the opportunities that would come your way if you provided your clients service that was better than barely tolerated. When was the last time you got a group together in your firm to brainstorm ways to provide better service?

### Why Client Service is Not a Top Priority

Nancy and I were in Los Angeles and stayed at one of my favorite hotels **The Peninsula Beverly Hills**. It is probably one of the more expensive hotels in the area, but I am willing to pay more because the service is far superior. The rooms are nice, the mattress and pillows are nice, but it is the service that brings me back each time. What can you learn from the Peninsula?

In Stand Out from the Crowd, I pointed out that while most all law firms talk about client service, a high percentage do not deliver it. Since law firms know their clients are not enthused by the service they receive, it should be a top priority for every law firm. Why isn't service a top priority? From my experience in my own firm, I think I know some of the reasons:

1. Client service is not an integral part of the firm, office or practice group strategy.
2. Client service is not financially rewarded in compensation or bonuses.
3. Client service is not part of the firm, office or practice group culture.
4. Senior lawyers don't teach junior lawyers client-focused strategies.
5. No systems ensure client service is carried out.

At my old law firm I went to monthly practice group leader meetings. Client service was never mentioned at any meeting. I went to our annual retreats. Client service was never mentioned at any retreat. We did client surveys to determine what our best clients wanted. We never formulated a plan to implement what our clients told us.

Your clients expect your lawyers to do good work. You and every law firm you compete with does good work. Like The Peninsula, you can differentiate your firm by providing extraordinary service.

When was the last time your firm brainstormed ideas and formulated a plan to improve client service? When was the last time your firm asked its best clients to share one client service idea that would most benefit them? You have a huge chance to differentiate your firm if you make client service a priority.

## Want Higher Profits Per Partner

Some time ago I sat next to **Southwest Airlines** co-founder Herb Kelleher on a flight back to Dallas. It was the second time I had sat next to him on a flight. Each time I felt I learned something valuable from him.

As I left him, full of ideas and enthusiasm, I was reminded of something he had said that I read in the **Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba's** book, *Creating Customer Evangelists: How Loyal Customers Become a Volunteer Sales Force*.

Kelleher said:

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*We tell our people, 'Don't worry about profit. Think about customer service.' Profit is the by-product of customer service. It is not an end in and of itself.*

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What do you suppose would happen if a managing partner told the lawyers in her firm:

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*Don't worry about profits per partner or getting your hours. Instead focus on doing the best work possible and on client service.*

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I wonder what would happen to the profits per partner and the hours billed by associates?

## Major Challenge for Multi-Office Firms

Recently I read an HBR blog titled: Creating a Positive Professional Image. That and a recent hotel experience made me wonder whether your firm is creating a consistent positive professional image.

In two weeks, I spent three nights each week in two hotels of a well-known upscale hotel chain. My experience could not have been more different.

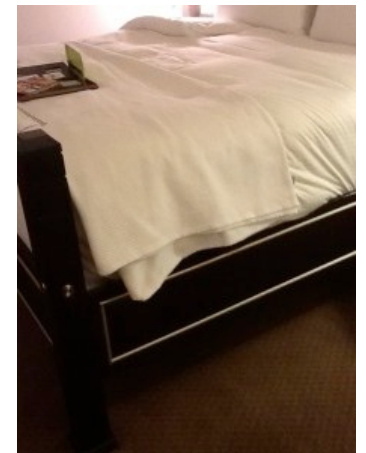
The hotel in the first city is only about a year old. It is luxurious and very modern. The rooms are large and my only challenge was to figure out the high tech on and off switches for lights, curtains and television. In the bathroom, a flat screen television was built into the mirror.

The ambience was impressive, but the service was even more impressive. When my cab arrived at the front door, a bellman opened my door and retrieved my luggage. He welcomed me by name while calling the front desk to let them know I was there. He learned I was on the executive club level and escorted me all the way up to that floor. Upon arrival at the executive club level, the person at the desk greeted me with a smile, and handed me my room key. When I told her I would come back to the lounge to get some sparkling water, the bellman offered to take my bags to my spacious room. My experience at the hotel was remarkable. Each night the executive level desk person greeted me by name, with a smile and asked if she could help in any way.

The next week I stayed for three nights in another city. To be kind, I would say the hotel is “dated.”

When I arrived no one met me at the door. I was left on my own to figure out how to get to the executive floor. After I checked in and went to my room, I saw an envelope with another guest's name on it. I called the executive floor desk person to make sure I had the right room. I was told that the guest had checked in to a different room. I soon figured out why.

When I looked around the incredibly small room, I discovered that the bed was about chest high. In all my



years I have never had to leap just to get into bed and then worry about getting out of it in the middle of the night. The club level advised me the mattresses were new and they needed to “cut down” the legs of the bed.

During the night I discovered that no matter how high I set the temperature, there was cold air coming from the fan. The next morning I made coffee and discovered the hot water never made it to the pot. Picture my challenge getting the top of the coffee pot full of hot water and a floating coffee envelope to the sink. Oh, I forgot to tell you that the bathroom was so small, I had to close the door to be able to stand at the sink.

I was surprised that the level of service was not up to the standards of the hotel the week before. I never saw a smile on the face of a staff member. I can't remember anyone saying: “Can I help you?” It was a strange experience to say the least.

In contrast when I stay in Ritz Carlton hotels, the ambience is upscale whether the hotel was built last year, or several years ago. More importantly, the service is extraordinary and consistent.

Does your firm have more than one office? If so, is the ambience and level of service extraordinary and consistent? If, not your clients will tell stories pointing out the differences.

## Use Budgets to Set Yourself Apart

What do your corporate clients want other than good results? Actually, it is easier for me to answer what they don't want. I

know from my own experience and from talking to in-house lawyers that more than anything else, they do not want surprises. How do you avoid them? Put simply, developing a plan and budget at the beginning of a project and keeping the in-house counsel apprised of changes is the best thing to do to avoid surprises.



The effectiveness of this approach was confirmed in a summary of a webinar "**Managing Outside Counsel Getting Off on the Right Foot — and Staying in Step**" presented by the Association of Corporate Counsel.

I was intrigued because I worked with one of the participants in the webinar and utilized some of the thoughts expressed in the webinar. The first suggestion is to prepare a budget. I frequently prepared both a plan and a budget because I knew my competitors did not prepare one. The synopsis suggests breaking down the budget by tasks. One way you can do this is to use a modified version of the **ABA's Uniform Task-Based Management System**. It will help you identify the potential tasks. I recommend you identify both the lawyers and staff in your firm who will be working on the matter and the client resources you will need.

The second suggestion is to track actual costs and compare those costs to the budget. A budget is of little value if it is set aside as soon as work on the matter begins. Once again, You

can likely set yourself apart by paying close attention to what is happening and identifying when something changes and letting the in-house lawyer know right away.

If you are like me, you hate preparing budgets and plans because of the time it takes and because of the uncertainty. I did it and you should also because your clients value it and it will give you the opportunity to distinguish yourself.

## Sometimes It's 24/7

I traveled to New York to give two presentations. When I put my **MacAir** computer in a tray and on the belt at DFW, I watched as TSA backed up the belt and my computer fell to the floor. After I got through security I tried to turn my computer on, and to my horror, nothing happened.



Fortunately, I had wireless on the plane. I started going through potential Plan Bs. With my **iPad** I contacted lawyers I knew in New York in the hope one might have a Mac computer. I loaded the presentations on my iPad, realizing I had

not brought the VGA connection for my iPad and would need to buy a new one.

Joyce began trying to convert the two presentations from Keynote to PowerPoint. This was time consuming and difficult. Joyce also contacted Clarice, our contact at the New York law firm.

Clarice came up with a great plan for us. **The 5th Avenue Apple Store** is open 24/7, 365 days a year. Joyce made an appointment at the Genius Bar for me at 10:00 pm and directed me to take a cab directly from the airport to the store.

I arrived at the store in my suit and tie with my suitcase and briefcase. As I waited to see the Genius who would work on my computer, I bought a VGA cable for my iPad and went through the slides. Two videos would not play on the iPad, but everything else seemed to work. That would be my Plan B.

In the last five minutes before I saw the young man at the Genius Bar, I decided to turn on my computer, just to see what would happen. Miracle of miracles, it started and seemed to be ok. When I got to the Genius Bar, the young man did a complete diagnostic check and everything checked out. The presentations went well, my computer worked fine and all the videos played.



Thank you Apple for having a store in New York that is open 24/7. Next time you are in New York visit this store late at night. You will find more people in the store than in a large department store during a year end sale.

## My 24/7 Example

When I asked my construction clients to help me create a Client Service Policy statement, they specifically told me they wanted us to meet deadlines we had set to complete a task. They also wanted us to be accessible, which they explained as being available to talk 24/7.

I had a client who regularly called me at 6:30 am. His receptionist, who was at work that early, had every way to reach me possible. Fortunately for me I had no clients who tried to reach me late at night.

My clients wanted Joyce to know where I was and how I could be reached. Finally they wanted me to be available to travel to their offices and project sites on short notice.

A few years ago Nancy and I were off to Laguna Beach for a romantic four-day interlude at the Ritz Carlton. When we got off the plane at Orange County Airport, my Blackberry had a message to call the administrative assistant for my largest client's CEO. When I called she said "Ken needs you in Denver tonight to meet with him for dinner and prepare for a meeting that has just been called for 9 am tomorrow." I looked at Nancy, who knew what was coming.

We drove to the Ritz Carlton, checked in and ate lunch. Then Nancy drove me back to Orange County to catch my flight to Denver. The next evening she picked me up at the airport in time for a romantic dinner. She understood that we have a lifetime for romance, but when Ken needed me for a meeting, I had to be responsive. As you might imagine, I am fortunate to have such an understanding and supportive wife.



# Client Service

## How to Do It

### Delight Your Clients

I am often asked how to create a business development culture in a law firm. It begins by understanding the firm's clients' needs and being creative in responding to them. Client surveys show that clients do not feel they are receiving the service they deserve. So, if you can set your firm apart from other firms, you will have a real opportunity.

Here are three simple things I did when I was practice group leader and in charge of attorney development in my old law firm. You can do them also.

#### GALLERY 3.1 Client Service Goals

### Client Service Goals of the Construction and Government Contracts Practice Group

The lawyers and staff of the Construction Law Practice Group at Jenkens & Gilchrist realize that providing quality service to our Clients is as important as providing quality work. Through this Client Service Policy members of our Practice Group are setting goals for the representation of our construction industry Clients by which we expect our performance to be measured.

It is our express goal to become your law firm of choice, but not simply for the duration of any particular project—we view any representation as the opportunity to earn the position of your principal outside legal counsel for years to come.

#### 1. RESPONSIVENESS

- We will keep our promises on meeting deadlines.
- We will return all telephone calls, e-mails, and correspondence as soon as possible, but in every instance within twenty-four (24) hours, including weekends if required by the Client's circumstances.
- We will respond to a matter based on the urgency determined by the Client.

#### 2. EXPECTATIONS

- Prior to beginning a project, we will work with our Client to establish expectations for quality and timeliness, and establish a plan for accomplishing our Client's goals within cost parameters that are commensurate with the complexity and value of the particular matter.
- We will keep our Clients informed of developments, progress, and decisions they need to make.
- We will make our best efforts to exceed our Client's expectations.
- We will meet with our Clients face-to-face at least once a year to obtain feedback on the quality of our work and the quality of our service.

#### 3. INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

- Our lawyers focus on the construction industry.
- We attend industry meetings and write for industry publications.

1. Create a Client Service Policy. Just suppose you interviewed your clients to find out what they valued from a service standpoint and then you created a client service policy based on the feedback you received. My construction law practice group did that and found it was not only a great client service tool, but also served as a great marketing tool. We had it printed and put a link on our web site. We gave it to our new and existing clients at the beginning of any significant matter. It gave us a vehicle to then ask for an evaluation based on the policy after we completed an assignment.

2. Put Associates in Your Clients' Offices Knowing that clients do not want to pay for associates to learn about their business, consider putting associates in their offices for a week or two weeks at no charge. Your associates will gain from learning about the company, will make friends and occasionally bring back a new file.



3. Conduct Client Point of View Programs. Many of your firm's clients like to share their perspectives. Consider creating a quarterly "Client Point of View" program that will give them the opportunity. Have a firm partner bring a client representative to an associate or firm lunch. Have the client tell the associates about his or her company, about the relationship with the partner and generally good and bad experiences with lawyers and firms. Then have the partner and client talk about a specific topic like billing or responsiveness or knowledge of

industry/company and what was expected from associates in work for the company. I think your clients will enjoy speaking about their company, themselves and what they like and do not like. They will also feel a stronger connection to your firm.

These are three simple ideas your firm can implement right away.

## Get Your Clients to Recommend You

In Chapter 2, I wrote about the importance of focusing on client service if you want higher profits per partner.

Seems like a "no-brainer." But,

- When was the last time you talked about client service at a firm meeting?
- When was the last time you talked to your professional staff about client service?
- When was the last time your firm did any training on client service?
- When was the last time you talked to your clients about client service?

**BTI Consulting Group** surveys reveal that clients are not pleased with the service they receive from their law firms. In a report titled **The Declining Client Satisfaction Antidote**, BTI reported that 70% of clients will not recommend their law

firm to others. According to the report, clients believe their law firms are:

1. Not keeping up with changing client needs.
2. Doing a poor job of articulating and delivering value.
3. Poor communication between law firms and clients.

That means any law firm or lawyer whose service is just slightly better will be unique. Just imagine what would happen to your business if clients gave your firm an A+ on client service?



Here are 10 easily implemented client service actions to improve service.

1. Be more Responsive. Promptly respond to phone calls, email, and correspondence. Keep your client informed
2. Be a team player. Figure out ways to help the in-house counsel or other client representative succeed.

3. Listen to not only what is said, but how it is said and what is not said.
4. Make personal visits. You will learn more things that will give you the business context of the legal matter. You might even bring home a new file.
5. Bill with clarity, accuracy and based on value. Clients resent paying for inefficiency.
6. Keep your team together. Clients do not like “breaking in” lawyers who do not know their business.
7. Get feedback from clients on how you can improve your service and respond proactively, including preparing a client service policy.
8. Make sure you understand the technology that is available to better serve your clients.
9. Understand the clients’ industry, company and the needs of the individual client representatives.
10. Seek to uncover potential client problems, opportunities and changes and develop solutions to handle them.
11. Provide client service training for your lawyers and staff and make client service an agenda item at every firm meeting.

12. Read books on customer service from other industries. You might start with Joseph Michelli's book about Ritz Carlton service titled: **The New Gold Standard**.

Is there anything that you would add?

## Anticipating Needs, Offering Solutions

I had coffee with a former partner of mine. He told me he was going back to his second home in **San Miguel de Allende** the next day. I have always wanted to visit there, in part because the weather is so moderate and in part because we can get there in only a few hours on **American Airlines**. San Miguel de Allende was also voted number 4 in **Travel and Leisure's 2010 Top 10 Cities in the World**.

Upon returning to my office I went on the internet and found **Bella Casa** on **VRBO**. I saw that it was unoccupied for 4th of July weekend and sent an email to see if it was still available.



I went to lunch and when I returned I had a message from Charles Soberman. He had taken time to find me and call me. He offered to rent us Bella Casa at a very reasonable price, and after checking with my boss (Nancy), we accepted. Here is what Charles did after that:

- Arranged for our transportation from the airport and back with Pascual.
- Contacted Mari, the housekeeper and had her waiting for us when we arrived.
- Sent us a detailed list of things to do to prepare for our trip.
- Sent us a list of what to do when we depart Bella Casa.
- Sent us a list of his and Linda's favorite restaurants.
- On our first evening at Bella Casa, Charles called to see if everything was all right and if we needed any additional help.



Bella Casa is spacious and really, really nice. But, part of what makes the experience unique is that Charles and Linda have anticipated questions and potential problems renters might experience and offered a solution before the renters have asked a question. Charles and Linda even write a blog called **San Miguel News**.

So, what is the lesson for you? The best lawyers I know anticipate problems or questions clients might have and offer solutions before the clients ask the questions. Nancy and I experienced what that feels like when we rented Bella Casa. You can do it successfully when you see the world through your clients' eyes and then anticipate what they need.

P.S. When we left San Miguel the temperature was about 65 degrees. When we stepped out of DFW airport the temperature was 104. It is easy to see why so many Texans have purchased second homes or choose to visit San Miguel de Allende in the summer.

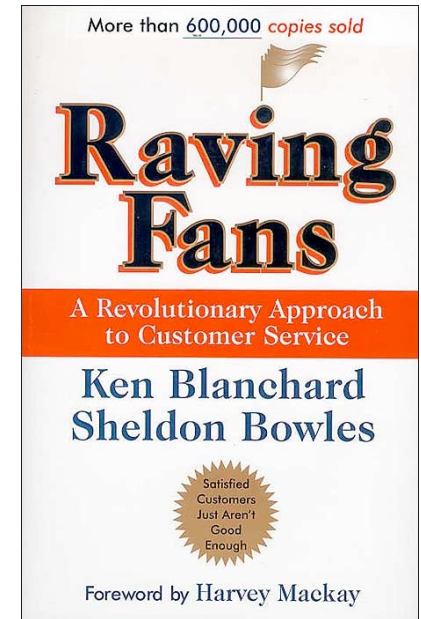
## Make Clients “Raving Fans”

In Chapter 2, I identified five reasons law firms are not providing extraordinary service. Whatever the reason for the neglect in client service, the result will always be the same. The firm or practice group will become one of the firms fired or not recommended by the client.

Several years ago a regional manager of one of our building contractor clients who built complicated high tech buildings gave me a copy of *Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach To Customer Service* by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles. It is a great book that I frequently recommend to lawyers I coach. One of the main points in the book is to discover what the customer (client) wants and "deliver that plus one."

In my construction law practice group, I sought to implement the "Raving Fans" client service concept in several ways:

1. Interviewing our clients to find out what was important to them and then creating our Client Service Goals
2. Beating our budget or the estimated time on the project
3. Remaining consistent and avoiding surprises
4. Conducting in-house workshops
5. Sharing our legal research with our clients
6. Sitting in on the client's strategy meetings at no charge
7. Sending copies of any article we found that might impact the client's business— whether it was about a legal issue or not
8. Brainstorming among ourselves and with our clients on other ways we could add value
9. Putting an associate in the client's office or on a construction project for a week at no charge.



10. Conducting a program for the in-house lawyers on how to effectively manage outside counsel.

When you meet with lawyers in your firm or practice group, what will be on your list of ways to provide extraordinary service for your clients?

## Exceed Expectations

This is not rocket science. Law firms know that business clients are not happy with the service they receive from outside counsel. Yet, law firms for some reason do not make changes. According to surveys, most firms actually think their clients are satisfied.

Business clients who have significant outside legal expenditures compare your firm with others. How does your firm stack up?

I have recommended *Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach To Customer Service* by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles many times on this blog. One of the main points of the book is to deliver what your customer expects, plus one. In other words provide extraordinary service that exceeds your client's expectations.

Charlie, the main character in *Raving Fans* learns this secret at a service station. There he was greeted by two smiling service attendants in spotless uniforms. Needless to say the service was unlike what is experienced in most service stations to-

day, yet the price was the same as the self service station. They called Charlie by name after seeing it on his credit card.

Charlie learned that the attendants were paid bonuses and were promoted on the basis of their service. After Charlie had paid for the gas, the attendants let Charlie know his business was really appreciated and gave him a gift certificate for a car wash and 10 percent off the next purchase.

Andrew, the service station owner tells Charlie that in a service business, "you have to deliver all the time. The service has to be consistent to create credibility and earn trust." To accomplish that, Andrew suggests limiting the number of areas where you want to make a difference. Do one thing well and then move on to another thing. He also says to promise less than you deliver, but the focus in that statement is not to drive promises down, but rather to drive delivery up.



How can your law firm provide extraordinary service and exceed expectations? Here are a few ways:

- Beating your budget or beat the estimated time to complete your project.
- Be consistent and avoid surprises.
- Do in-house workshops.
- Share your legal research with your clients.
- Sit in on your clients' strategy meetings at no charge.
- Put one of your lawyers in your client's office for a week at no charge.
- Whether it is a legal issue or not, when you find something you think may impact their business, send them a copy.
- Create guides on specific legal topics and give them to your clients.
- The latest thing might be to create an iPhone app with the guide on it.
- Brainstorm among your lawyers, and with your clients to find other ways to add value.

## Energize Your Professional Staff

**Ritz Carlton** refers to its staff as “ladies and gentlemen” and they even have a page featuring some of their ladies and gentlemen. As you also know, law firms refer to their staff as “non-lawyers.” I suspect the morale of the Ritz Carlton ladies and gentlemen is greater than your non-lawyers.

Isn't the professional staff of a law firm as important to the level of service clients receive as the ladies and gentlemen who work with Ritz Carlton? When I practiced law, I thought so, and after reading *Raving Fans* by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles, I decided to create a “Plus One Client Service” program in each of our offices.

I wanted to share with you the game plan in case you want to start a program. We created office contests. Here is the plan one of our offices used that your office can use as a model:

1. Purchase several copies of the book and circulate to your staff.
2. Ask each staff member to answer the three Raving Fans secrets:
  - What do you want?
  - What do your clients (lawyers in the office and clients) want?
  - What three things can we do to really make a difference with our clients?

3. For each service area decide:

- What your service area wants.
- What your service area's clients want.
- What three things your service area can do to make the greatest difference.



4. Then the office administrator announces the contest. The staff will vote at the end of the year for which person in the office best represents the “Raving Fans” ideals. The prize might be weekend at a resort.

5. Begin putting into practice: Each staff group in the office sets three top goals to be handled consistently Plus One.

6. Long Term Goal: The staff discusses and creates their purpose, core values and mission statement of how they want to work as a team.

7. Then, for the rest of the year the office staff shares and celebrates delivering plus one service.

8. At the end of the year the staff in the office votes on the Plus One award.

## Empower Your Lawyers

One reason Ritz Carlton delivers extraordinary service is that they hire the right people, train them better than any other hotel and empowers their “ladies and gentlemen” to do something extraordinary for a guest. In a book every lawyer should read: *The New Gold Standard: 5 Leadership Principles for Creating a Legendary Customer Experience Courtesy of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company* the author writes:

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*In the culture Ritz Carlton, which emphasizes Service Values like ‘I am empowered to create unique, memorable, and personal experiences for our guests’ and ‘I own an immediately resolve guest problems,’ the choice to shift responsibility to someone else is not an option.*

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I stayed two nights at a hotel in Calgary. When I checked in I was given two breakfast certificates. I knew I would not be able to use the second one because I had to be at the airport before the restaurant opened and I would be eating breakfast on the flight. So, I asked the front desk clerk if I could possibly apply the amount of the breakfast certificate (about \$12) to my dinner at the same restaurant. She looked at me and said: “I am sorry Mr. Parvin, these are breakfast certificates and can only be used for breakfast.”

Now, it wasn't really a big deal for me or the hotel. After all it was only \$12. But, it pointed to one of the reasons Ritz Carlton shines. and other hotels do not. At a Ritz Carlton hotel the person at the front desk would have had the authority to do something if she chose. She might say: "We can't let you use the certificate towards dinner, but how would you feel if we upgraded your room?"

Here is the sad thing: I believe if you asked clients which of these two experiences would best describe their experience working with your law firm, the majority, and perhaps the vast majority, would say my experience in Calgary is closer to the experience they have with their law firms.

I wonder what would happen to profits per partner at a law firm that matched Ritz Carlton's approach to hiring, training and empowering their lawyers and staff?



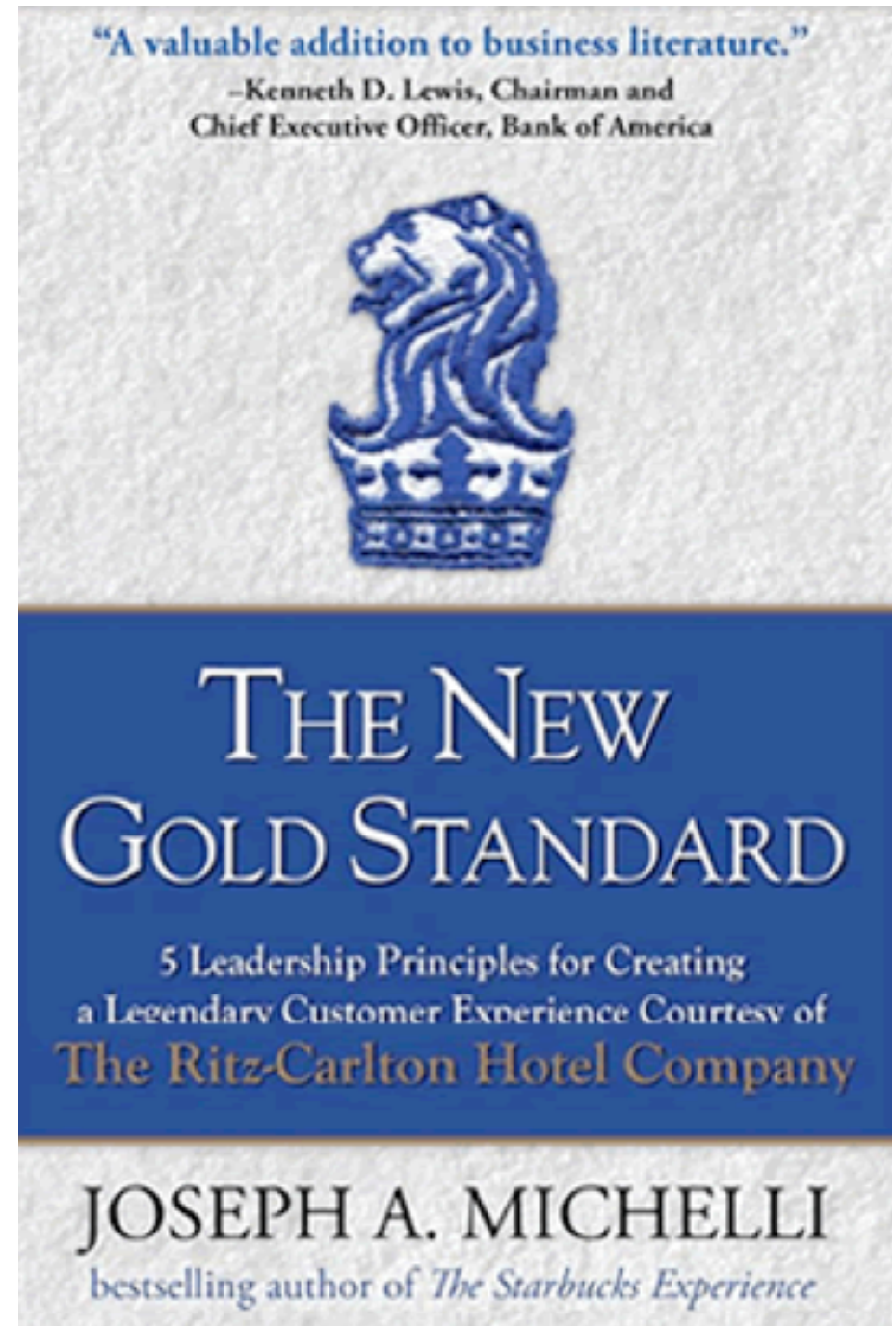
CHAPTER 4

# Client Service

## The Ritz Carlton Way

Throughout my career I rarely learned about client service from observing what law firms were doing. I focused on what other service business leaders were doing. I write frequently about the service I receive at Ritz Carlton hotels. You may also know I read *The New Gold Standard*, the book about Ritz Carlton service by **Joseph A. Michelli**.

Long ago, Ritz Carlton decided they wanted to create “the new gold standard” for the hotel industry. They sought first to define what that meant and ever since they have tried to live and work to that standard every single day.



I urge you to buy the book and highlight the points and stories that resonate with you. Here is one of the many I like:

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*The Ritz Carlton, South Beach had many guests who boarded five motor coaches bound for the 2007 Super Bowl at Dolphin Stadium. During the game there was a steady rain. Back at the South Beach Ritz Carlton, the ladies and gentlemen brainstormed how to take care of their wet guests. The laundry team prepared 300 heated towels. The front office contacted the motor coach drivers and found out where they were parked. The guest services team loaded the towels into hotel cars and two food and beverage team members drove them to the waiting motor coaches at the stadium. After the game the guests found the warm folded towels with the familiar Ritz Carlton logo waiting for them in the bus seats. When the guests arrived back at the hotel they were greeted with umbrellas and led back to the warm, relaxed, and dry ambience with hot chocolate and coffee.*

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This is another story of Ritz Carlton employees anticipating a problem and offering a solution before their guests identified the problem. As you are reading the book, think about what you and your firm could do to become the new gold standard for lawyers and law firms. How would you define it? Better yet, how would your clients define it? How would make sure

your lawyers and staff live and work to that standard each and every day?

## Experience the Service

Even though there are differences in Apple Macs and PCs, for me the two computers function in much the same way. The real difference is the experience owning and using my Mac computer. It is the service at the Apple store at the Genius Bar, in the group training that is offered and in my one-on-one training. Apple isn't the only company focused on providing extraordinary service. I recently came across a great Wall Street Journal article on service titled "[Selling the Special Touch.](#)" If you want to learn some valuable ideas about client service read the article and even consider going to the training Ritz Carlton offers on client service. I have experienced client service the Ritz Carlton way first hand.

In 2005 my daughter got married within a week of mine and Nancy's 35th anniversary. So, we planned an anniversary trip to Hawaii in November. An extremely urgent client matter came up which required me to cancel our trip to Hawaii. We then decided we would take a three day weekend and go to the [Ritz Carlton at Marina del Rey](#) in Southern California. As a treat we decided to stay on the club level. (If you haven't ever done it, stay at least one time on the



club level at a Ritz Carlton.) Two days before our check-in I received a call at my office from Maria. Maria worked on the club level and she wanted to talk with me about my upcoming trip. She asked if I had any special requests. I reported we would be landing at LAX at about 8:30 AM and would really appreciate an early check-in. Then she asked if this was a special occasion. I told her it was a belated 35th anniversary trip.

Two days later we arrived at the hotel at about 9:15 AM. People were checking out. When we got to the front of the line to check in, the person behind the desk called Maria over to greet us. She told us she would check us in on the club level. She said there were two different rooms with different views that were available now. After we selected the room we liked best, Maria checked us in and introduced us to Tom who was the day manager of the club level lounge. At a point Tom asked if I had any questions about the club level. I asked what time they opened on Saturday morning. I think he said 7:00 on the weekends. Since that would be 9:00 Dallas time, I wanted coffee earlier in the morning. I asked where the closest Starbucks was. He told me and said they likely opened about 7:00 on Saturday also. I thought he was wrong about that, but I didn't say anything.

In the afternoon, Nancy and I went for a long walk along the water. When we got back to our room we found a coffee pot, two Ritz Carlton mugs, enough Starbucks cof-



fee to last a week and a couple of other treats from Starbucks. Tom's handwritten note wished us a happy anniversary and told us to keep the Ritz Carlton mugs as an anniversary gift from the hotel. I was blown away. Tom had obviously listened to me and knew he could provide extraordinary service by finding a way for me to have coffee before he opened the club lounge.

For many of us as lawyers, when our clients come to us to help them, it is not a Ritz Carlton vacation. Instead we are helping them solve what may be a very difficult problem. How can we apply the Ritz Carlton service to that help we give our clients?

## Learn from Ritz Carlton

In Chapter 1 I wrote about two hotel experiences. One was a bad experience at a Las Vegas hotel and the other was a good experience at a Ritz Carlton hotel. I mentioned that I bought the book *"The New Gold Standard"* by Joseph A. Michelli, because I wanted to get a better sense of how Ritz Carlton provides such extraordinary service that guests like me are willing to pay more for it. I just finished the book on my last flight and have highlighted many passages and dog-eared many pages. My brain was racing as I tried to figure out how law firms could create the Ritz Carlton experience for their clients.

I know that many law firms have mission statements and core values statements. Yet, I know of no law firm that keeps those lofty statements constantly on the minds of their lawyers and staff and makes sure they are put into action to benefit clients.

Ritz Carlton does it by having a tri-fold pocket “Gold Standards” card. It is also known as the “Credo Card.” Each employee carries the card in his or her pocket each and every day as a reminder. Now, I am sure that sophisticated and skeptical lawyers would find it hokie to be carrying a card outlining what the firm is all about. So, good luck on selling that concept.

The Credo is Ritz Carlton’s definition of the ‘ultimate guest experience.’ It has three statements all focused on the commitment to the guests. Maria Thompson, a sales administrative assistant at the Phoenix Ritz Carlton told Michelli:

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*“I think if the corporate world took our Credo and applied the concepts to whatever industry they were in, and really applied it from the very top to the very bottom of the organization, the world would be a better place, in terms of corporate life. By ‘better place’ I mean better retention, happier managers, and greater profitability.”*

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What is your definition of the “ultimate client experience?” What statements would you make to describe it? If you apply the concepts from top to bottom in your law firm, you just might have better retention, happier lawyers and greater profits per partner.

## I Want to Be Like Bill Richardson, Jr.

A young lawyer I coach shared with me that he was the responsible attorney and had day-to-day contact with representatives of a senior partner’s client. He asked how he might take advantage of the great relationships he had developed to get his own new clients.

I first suggested that he consider telling those client representatives that if they knew any other companies that would value working with a lawyer like him, he would be honored if they recommended him. He told me if that got back to the partner for whom he worked, the partner would be upset with him.

Then I told him he should try to be more like Bill Richardson, Jr. He looked at me with the: “Who in the world is Bill Richardson, Jr.” look and I shared this with him.

Bill Richardson, Jr. is my new hero. I want to be more like him. Bill is a Shoe Shine Specialist at the Philadelphia Ritz Carlton.

Bill has never shined my shoes. Yet, I see him every day when I leave by the side door. He greets me with a big smile. He is always happy and upbeat. He engages me in conversation. I watch him help guests in a variety of dif-



ferent ways. As I walk out the door, he always tells me to have a blessed day. I leave more upbeat about my day than before I saw him.

I have to confess, I would likely stay at the Philadelphia Ritz Carlton even if Bill was not there. I stay because of the quality of the hotel. Bill simply makes the experience far more enjoyable and uplifting.

What is the point for you? Clients will hire your senior partner and feel comfortable with you doing the work, because they trust you to handle their legal work. But, just as I have shared this story with you, clients will go out of their way to tell others about you if you are like Bill Richardson, Jr. Imagine one of those client representatives telling a friend in another company that you are not only a great lawyer, but you are also a good guy with whom to work.

The young lawyer and I left our meeting at the hotel and walked out the side door. As always, Bill greeted us with a big smile and asked how we were doing. After we left the hotel, the young lawyer told me he understood my point.

BTW, I bet you cross paths with someone like Bill Richardson, Jr. If you do, one of the greatest gifts you can give him or her is it to simply let them know you appreciate them and they make a difference. Thank you Bill Richardson, Jr, for reminding me that a true “shoe shine artist” does far more than simply give shoes a good shine.

# About Cordell

Cordell Parvin practiced law for 37 years and developed a highly successful national construction law practice. He advised clients who built many of the largest construction projects in the country. Cordell also wrote a monthly column for *Roads and Bridges* magazine for 25 years.

During his career, Cordell taught, mentored and coached young lawyers. At Jenkins & Gilchrist, PC, Cordell initiated and directed the firm's Attorney Development Program. He created a comprehensive program for associate development focused on career planning and enhancing skills through mentoring and shadowing. Cordell also developed a client-development coaching program for the firm's young partners. His enthusiasm for helping lawyers achieve greater success prompted him to create a consulting practice.

Cordell earned his law degree from the University of Richmond and his Bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech. He is a member of the American Bar Association, the Texas State Bar Association, the Virginia State Bar Association, Associated General Contractors of Texas, the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, and the American Arbitration Association.

## Also by Cordell Parvin

**Say Ciao to Chow Mein:** Conquering Career Burnout

**Rising Star:** The Making of a Rainmaker

**Prepare to Win:** A Lawyer's Guide to Rainmaking, Career Success and Life Fulfillment

**It Takes a Team:** You Can't Make Rain by Yourself

To purchase Cordell's books, please visit Life Career Publishing: [www.lifecareerpublishing.com](http://www.lifecareerpublishing.com)

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