

Focus PERSONAL INJURY

Giving clients emotional support



William Teggart

While a lawyer's primary goal may be to serve their clients through recovering compensation, completing a real estate transactions or drafting wills, today's clients want and deserve more from their law firm. It is no longer enough to simply provide advice and respond to telephone calls. Clients want someone who listens, and who can empathize, support and empower them. Today's clients are seeking an emotionally intelligent (EI) law firm.

Despite this, the majority of lawyers continue to speak to the thinking brain by ignoring or avoiding the powerful emotions that they may be confronted with during client sessions. Thus, these meetings can often end in frustration and confusion on both sides, with several questions going unanswered. Today's clients are seeking advice, but also support. It's time lawyers polish their EI skills by learning to give the client not only what they require legally, but as a supportive service provider. Here are four steps building an emotionally intelligent practice:

Set client expectations

The initial lawyer/client interaction will define a smooth and successful relationship moving forward. Clients may have more than just an inherent distrust of lawyers—the language, legal concepts and paperwork can be extremely confusing, and can leave the client feeling powerless. An emotionally intelligent lawyer will recognize this discomfort and strive to put their client at ease. It is through these small actions, from offering a beverage to greeting their client with a warm smile, that will speak to their client's emotional brain and help put them at ease.

Listen, then counsel

Emotionally intelligent lawyers take time to discover the client's experience and tailor their advice in a way that resonates with their concerns. This lawyer recognizes the value of having a meeting that is client-directed as it provides insight into the client's perspective.

To help frame each meeting, an EI lawyer will provide their client with an agenda in advance so that they can invest their time



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responding to their client's questions and concerns. Questions are welcomed as they provide an opportunity to clarify challenging topics and help put their client's mind at ease. The EI lawyer recognizes the value of giving a voice to their client, and how it not only build the foundation for a trusting relationship but helps the client feels empowered.

Communication strategies

An emotionally intelligent lawyer recognizes the value in having multiple communication tools including smart board technology, models, videos, case studies and analogies. This lawyer is an observer constantly watching their client for signs of confusion and/or frustration. When these signs appear, the EI lawyer sees this as an opportunity to adjust their communication method and takes the time to clarify the information with their client.

An emotionally intelligent lawyer acknowledges not only their clients' emotional needs but how misunderstanding and confusion can trigger these negative emotions. Instead of fearing these

emotions, the EI lawyer acknowledges them and shifts their communication strategy to respond to their clients' need.

Evolve with experience

An emotionally intelligent lawyer sees every interaction as a learning opportunity. Each experience with a client will provide a lawyer with additional understanding on how to articulate complex issues and how to develop trust. This lawyer recognizes the importance in self-reflection, and the value in taking the time to analyze successes and struggles. This self-reflection allows the lawyer to begin to identify common patterns and concerns, and unveil the tools that help foster that trusting relationship. The EI lawyer strives to put themselves in the other person's shoes. They learn to empathize and adjust their style according to their client's needs, and in turn have interactions that are meaningful.

Communication is the foundation of emotional intelligence. It is about being attentive, responding to client's needs, empathizing and authentically listening. Today's lawyers need to invest the time to connect with their clients and empower them with advice that is tailored to their needs. Developing an emotionally intelligent law firm will reduce your client's anxiety level, decrease confusion and increase overall satisfaction. Today's lawyers need to stop addressing the thinking brain of their client and invest the time to respond to them at an emotional level.

William Teggart is a personal injury lawyer in Barrie, Ont., focusing on serious traumatic injury claims. He is an advocate on behalf of clients and their families and guides them through the emotional and legal steps to recovery after an accident.

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