

FEEDBACK

“Seek and Ye Shall find”

It is not complicated. Ask the person you serve two very simple and straightforward questions:

1. “I want to make sure my interactions with you meet, or better, exceed your expectations. So, please tell me three aspects you like most about my approach to serving you.”
2. “Also, please tell me three things I need to do better in order to improve my approach to serving you.”

I promise you; the first time you ask these questions, your client will likely appear dazed, nervous, suspicious, or confused. Why? It is because clients are rarely, if ever, asked these questions by the people who serve them. They will be taken aback. But their initial discomfort will ease, and your reward will be a wealth of invaluable information about your service relationship.

In general, people are much more comfortable delivering good news, so you can expect your client to reply by listing all of your positive attributes. This is beneficial for two reasons. First; it is an easier conversation to have, and the more your client enjoys the process, the more likely they are to welcome future exchanges. Second; and this is for you, if your client can't think of three positives, or the three they cite are pica-yune (“*the color of your letterhead is pleasing to the eye*”), that in itself is a potent message.

However, because this is about continuous *improvement*, the more important feedback is what your client asks you to do better. At first, this will likely feel awkward and embarrassing. But remember, by virtue of having this conversation, you are satisfying many of your client's soft needs (to feel important, listened to, respected) and validating the importance of your relationship.

What if your client insists there are no improvements to be made? Since there is little likelihood that everyone you serve is 100 percent satisfied, it means you will have to rely on others or a keen capacity for self-assessment to find areas of improvement. After all, if there is nothing you can do better, how will you grow the relationship?

Never have this “conversation” in an e-mail or via voice mail. You must ask these questions in person, make eye contact, observe body language, read emotions, and factor in the surroundings. Have a *conversation*. If your client is hesitant to talk, gently probe, revisit some successes, check to see if they would prefer a different time or place. But most of all, *talk often* because it will get easier and more fruitful with time and practice.

How do you deal with feedback?

Defense attorneys assert “You should never ask a question of a witness on the stand, if you don't already know the answer.” Perhaps a bit dramatic for our purposes, but it speaks to the value of preparation. Do not seek feedback from your client until you have thought about your questions, the client's potential responses, and your subsequent reactions. Your conversation can only be productive if you don't overreact or get defensive, and the remedy for that is preparation. Think through these questions:

- How will my client react to my questions?
- How will I feel about their responses?
- Will I immediately become defensive, and why?
- Will I believe what they say, and why?
- Do I plan to take action regarding their responses?

This last bullet point is important. Feedback given, but not acknowledged in the form of action, is little more than idle conversation. If your goal is to really improve relationships with those you serve and to really “Get Better at Getting Better”, the process of continuous improvement begins with FEEDBACK.

