LawVision

Creating Competitive Advantage

Tips from Global In-House Counsel On How to Add Value

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We have the great opportunity to often speak with in-house clients on behalf of our law firm clients. Much of what we hear is extremely positive and advice that is worth sharing. Common themes have emerged from hundreds of client interviews we've conducted. To heed their advice is to build strong advocates internal to their organizations and external to their colleagues. Here are some of their top tips — direct quotes:

1. Be Proactive About Reaching Out to Me

Whether it is for unprompted updates on a current piece of work, calling to say hello once in a while or checking in on how your team is doing with our team, reach out — it's important to do so and differentiates you from your competitors.

2. Keep Me Up-to-Date On Your Team

If there are any changes to the team, please let me know. Your team is our team and you must let us know about any changes, whether you are letting someone go, reassigning someone or adding someone; I prefer no surprises.

3. Make Sure Junior People Are Aware of Our Business

Otherwise, they will not be able to provide the best service in the correct context. The more they know about our business, the stronger our relationship becomes and the more we depend on you and your team. They need to learn this on their own time as part of their job as a lawyer.

4. Meet with Me at Least Once a Year

I'll even buy the lunch! Yes, I'm busy, but I'm also a good client and I expect you to not take the relationship for granted. Meeting with me to hear about things from my end means you are investing in our business relationship.

5. Provide Educational Programming

You can do this in the form of webcasts, onsite programming and white papers. The more you help educate us about your firm and how we may implement preventative measures, the more I have an opportunity to introduce you around our company.

6. Take the Time to Visit Our Global Head Quarters

Walk the plant floors. It never helps to stay behind your desk if our C-team doesn't know who you are. We visit our most important customers on a quarterly basis. I expect the same from our outside counsel.

7. Know Our Customers

Knowing us means also knowing our customer base. Tune into the challenges we face as a company and understand the expectations our customers have of us. Knowing your customer's customer is one of our corporation's mantras, and we expect the same of our key outside counsel relationships.

8. Involve Me In Your Succession Planning

I'm not a big fan of having it announced to me who will be my relationship partner. I'd rather be involved in the process. And don't expect to start the conversation a few months before your retirement. I expect the conversation to begin a few years before your retirement. If our primary relationship partner leaves one firm, get me involved right away to discuss his/her replacement. No surprises, please!

9. Make Sure I'm A Member of the Team

Yes, I'm busy, but be damn sure I'm not too busy to meet with my outside firms' members. I am particularly interested in making sure I am a member of their team and they are a member of my team. I expect them to respect my input on the deal or case strategy and not be bullies. I'm completely open to having their sales professionals meet with me as well. I understand the lawyers are busy and we value any connection to our outside firms including sales and finance professionals. Invite me to your client team meetings so the attorney and business development team really hear from me about what I/we think is important for them to know.

10. Have Proactive Conversations About Cost Containment

The number-one thing that has the most value to me is to have a proactive conversation with my outside counsel about cost containment. I'm not talking about discounts. I'm talking about having a conversation together that helps us both reach our goals. That's a seriously valuable conversation. Some firms offer to bring in their finance folks as well, which is very helpful. Other value adds include teaching us your best approaches for project management; case management; negotiation strategies and other useful business tools our lawyers and business folks may find valuable.

Conclusion

In summary, share this information, infuse your client team programs with new ideas, and stay connected to keep these valuable relationships healthy.