

## Your Staff Can Help Build Relationships With Elderly Clients

Surveys consistently show that when clients evaluate their lawyers, they use factors involving their relationship more frequently than qualities like technical skills or substantive results. When dealing with the elderly, your support staff can provide tremendous assistance in building good relationships with clients, particularly through telephone calls and visits.

### Client Telephone Calls

While you, of course, have a number of clients and pressing matters, to the elderly client who calls, his or her matter is the most important in the world. Therefore, everyone in the office must be prepared to respond appropriately. So take 10 minutes to meet with your staff to let them know how important it is for them to convey an office-wide attitude of concern, respect and friendliness to your elderly clients. For example:

➤ Secretaries and receptionists should articulate the name of your firm slowly and clearly and convey a tone of friendliness and concern to callers.

➤ If you are unavailable, the secretary or the receptionist should see if anyone else in the office can help or answer questions.

➤ All client telephone calls should be returned the same day - even better, within three hours. Make sure your staff understands their authority to help by, for example, returning client calls at the end of the business day.

### Client Visits

Visits to the office are very important in shaping client perceptions of the firm. This event is even more important with elderly clients because of potential mobility difficulties. To make a terrific impression, the staff can do the following:

➤ Secretaries should send elderly clients clear directions to the office before their appointments as well as instructions on parking, public transportation (if available) and handicap access to the building.

➤ Even if they are on the telephone, receptionists should acknowledge all client visitors immediately with eye contact and a smile.

➤ Receptionists or secretaries who greet clients should offer to hang up coats, get beverages, point out restrooms and, in short, do everything possible to make the client comfortable.

➤ Everyone in your office should be instructed to be helpful and patient with elderly clients, particularly those with mobility problems. For example, if a client with a walker must go to a conference room, the staff can volunteer to carry papers, hold doors and offer a friendly "No hurry—take your time" to make the client feel less anxious.

In short, when your staff makes your elderly clients feel like welcome guests, they appreciate how pleased you are to be of good service to them.

***This article was contributed by Sally J. Schmidt, a principal of Sally Schmidt Consulting, Inc. of Burnsville, Minn., providing marketing consulting and services for the legal profession.*** ■