

VALUABLE RESOURCE/By Sally J. Schmidt

Support Staff Joins the Marketing Effort

Non-attorney staff members can be walking advertisements for their firm. Even the way they dress and act can affect the firm's image.

AS LAW FIRMS become more sophisticated in their marketing efforts, they are spending a lot of time and money on helping make lawyers better business getters. Most law firms, however, continue to overlook some extremely important contributors to the marketing effort — the non-attorney staff.

Legal secretaries, legal assistants, receptionists, messengers, administrative staff, and word- and data-processing employees all play an important role in the delivery of legal services, and they could be valuable contributors to the marketing effort. To make best use of their potential, however, they need to be trained.

Why Train the Staff?

A law firm's support staff is important to the marketing effort for several reasons. First, the receptionist or secretary is, in many cases, the major contact a client has when calling the firm or when a client has difficulty reaching the attorney.

Second, staff members are potential sources of business, ideas and information. They all have friends, relatives or acquaintances who need legal assistance from time to time. And many staff members belong to clubs, associations or organizations that can provide attorneys with opportunities to gain visibility in the community.

Finally, staff members can be walking advertisements for a firm. What they say about the firm can be critical to its image and reputation in the community. Even their dress and demeanor may add to — or detract from — the firm's image.

Training in Marketing for Staff

The goals of a training program in marketing for non-attorney staff members could include the following:

- To help them understand their role in the marketing and delivery of legal services.
- To encourage them to speak positively about the firm and its services in the community.
- To have them gather and organize marketing-related information that may be too difficult or time consuming for the attorneys, such as mailing lists, sources of business, etc.
- To help them understand their role in the marketing and delivery of legal services.
- Recognition programs for significant anniversaries or excellent client service.
- Staff committees to tackle other related issues, such as the design and use of marketing-related forms or the upkeep of the offices.
- Bonuses for referrals of significant clients.

Training Pays Off

Many studies have shown that employees find their positions stressful if they are not adequately trained in all aspects of their jobs. Conversely, those who receive sufficient training feel less harried and more competent. This results in lower turnover and better service to clients, and has a significant effect on the firm's positive image and bottom line.

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There are several skill areas that could be emphasized in a support-staff training program:

- Client relations (familiarity with cases, learning and using client names, etc.).
- Telephone manner and conduct.
- Image (e.g., neatness of attire or work space).
- Professionalism.

A law firm might consider many other activities to help its staff members participate in the marketing program, including:

- An internal newsletter, to keep em-

- To help them understand the structure and nature of marketing activities within a firm.