

PROFITING FROM YOUR PRACTICE:

Give Your Clients (A) K.I.S.S. (For Valentine's Day)

by Kenneth J. Landau

Don't Kiss your clients (or your co-workers) for Valentine's Day, but follow the "K.I.S.S." principles and they will feel like you love them or at least are trying to help them.

Lore has it that the original "KISS" principle was created by the Harvard Business School and adopted by the Army in the 1950's. It was short for "Keep It Simple, Stupid". Later the principle was modified by corporate America in the 1970's and 80's to represent "Keep It Short and Simple". Now in the 21st century it has come to represent what you must do to keep your clients happy; demonstrate **Knowledge, Integrity, Service and Solutions**.

Give your clients (and potential clients) a "Kiss" by showing that you are **Knowledgeable** about a particular field or sub-specialty of the law and that it is a "niche" for you and your firm. This is especially important if it a legal problem that requires a certain expertise or experience (just as doctors tout themselves as specialists or sub-specialists in the practice of medicine.)

You must also demonstrate your **Integrity** at all times. Do not allow yourself to be used or manipulated by your clients or create any civil or criminal legal jeopardy for yourself or additional adverse consequences for either of you. If you cannot leave them or their legal problems significantly better off with your services, perhaps it is best to remember the Hippocratic oath and "do no harm". You must also be sure you have no interests conflicting with those of your client. If you are uncertain, **ask**. Consult your firm, colleagues or the Committee on Professional Ethics if you are not sure if representation or a certain course of action is appropriate. Your client will usually be glad you did and at least you will protect your conduct and your license to practice law.

Service to your clients is more important than ever. You usually do not have a monopoly on providing legal services to them. It is more important than ever to make sure that they can easily contact you, that you return their phone calls and keep them informed as to the status of their matter. Service is also important: schedule legal proceedings and appointments as conveniently as possible for your clients (just as retailers and health providers are beginning to do).

Lastly, the **KISS** principle represents providing **Solutions** for your clients. This means cost-effective solutions that will leave your clients significantly better off than before you became involved. It may mean referring them to another lawyer, non-profit or governmental agency who can provide them with a more cost-effective resolution. It may mean advising them to ignore the issue or problem, to move on, to monitor it or to

try to resolve it in a non-legal or consumer- friendly setting. It may represent providing an alternative billing arrangement or merely a free or low-cost consultation so that they will be better able to work out a solution for themselves. You may have to act more as counselor and advisor rather than litigator and educate your clients how to avoid future problems. Sometimes you cannot solve their problem in a cost-effective manner but can only help point them in the right direction.

Attorneys who follow the "KISS" principles will attract more clients and leave them more satisfied. Their clients will also be better informed about the law and what it can accomplish for them. With the tight economy and increasing animosity toward lawyers, "KISS" represents the best practices in maximizing clients and minimizing distrust of the legal profession.

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