



KORBITEC

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A Legal Practice- more than the sum of its parts

Ever really think about what makes your favourite restaurant your favourite restaurant or your favourite hairdresser your favourite hairdresser? Is it the taste of the food or the look of your haircut, is it the treatment you receive or maybe it's the cleanliness of the place? In all likelihood it's not one particular thing that makes your favourite restaurant (or hairdresser) your favourite restaurant (or hairdresser) - it's probably your overall experience of the service that keeps you going back time after time!

What drives your clients' experiences?

Accepting that a client's overall experience of a service is what keeps them loyal and happy; you need to ask yourself what drives those client's experiences? Is it the way they are communicated with or how quickly their issues are resolved or even how good the coffee offered to them is? Again it isn't one particular thing- it's how well the individual parts work together to make the client experience superior. With so many variables contributing to a positive client experience where does one start to ensure clients have the best possible experience?

People, Process and Technology

It's with understanding that all businesses (including legal practices) require three basic categories of resources to provide a superior client experience AND these three categories of resources need to be optimally combined. What are these categories of resources? People, Process and Technology- aside from being very cool buzzwords, if any one of these resources are not any good in your practice or are not combined optimally it's almost certain your clients are not completely enjoying their overall experience of your services! Simplistically what are:

1. **People:** your staff, your correspondents or anyone else that interacts with your clients on your behalf
2. **Processes:** the steps involved in making what a client's needs (not necessarily the same as what a client wants or asks for) a reality
3. **Technology:** the gadgets (software and hardware) used in delivering a service

Using coffee served to a client as an example, the people would be the secretary or office assistant, the process would start at when the offer is made to the time when the coffee is served and the technology would include the coffee machine, microwave oven and

crockery used. The client experience would suffer if for example you had the world's best coffee machine but the secretary did not know how to make coffee or use the machine or the process didn't involve the client being asked if he/she liked his/her coffee with or without milk.

Looking more holistically at your practice- you have made the technology investment in GhostPractice (kudos to you), now what? Firstly, at least you're better off than a significant number of your competitors- you have established a platform from which you can work towards making your client's experiences positive.

Now you need to make sure your staff are up to the task- how:

1. Determine their technical proficiency- how well do they understand their jobs or what is their level of knowledge regarding their job functions
2. Determine their proficiency on the tools they use- how well do they understand the functionality of the tools used
3. Determine their attitude towards their jobs and personal development

Once you have made these determinations you need to put in place a plan to rectify any deficiencies- this may include training, mentoring or adjustments to how staff are managed or work is performed. You may even have to replace them- this should be your last option for two simple reasons: replacing staff is a lengthy process and it can cause problems with staff retained. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the replacement staff will be any better. Furthermore considerable effort should be placed on hiring the right staff as the consequences of hiring the wrong people will drive your costs up (recruitment fees are only example of the direct cost of hiring staff) and could lead to the demise of your practice.

You should also actively work to put processes and mechanisms in place to monitor staff performance and maintain performance.

The third facet you need to have optimised in order for your clients' experiences to be positive are your business processes. These processes do not only relate to how you deliver services, e.g. Debt Collection, Litigation, Conveyancing; but include all your practice support activities- Financial (billing, credit extension), Human Resource (recruitment, payroll), Facilities (access control, repairs and maintenance), Information Technology (document management, contact management), etc.

When one thinks about it, getting your business processes optimised seems daunting- due to the sheer volume of business processes taking place in any organisation and the complexity of these processes. One might be forgiven for thinking- my practice works without any dedicated focus on our business processes so why bother optimising them.... but the reality is that this is as effective as buying a safe to protect your valuables but still keeping them out in the open.

Ideally you should have a plan to ensure that your business processes keep pace with the changes in your business- if you have just bought GhostPractice why are you still preparing invoices in MS Word or Excel? How should one go about optimising business processes:

1. Identify and document all your business processes
2. Analyse those processes to determine if they are optimised



3. If not, determine how you are going to change them- using gadgets (software and other tools), people (training, hiring, firing or redeployment of available staff), changing the way activities are performed (processes) or some combination of these.
4. Assess the effects of the changes on your entire practice and if necessary adjust your changes so that they do not negatively impact on other parts of your practice
5. Implement the changes
6. Monitor performance to ensure that the changes have resulted in improvements by measuring and quantifying performance.

Remember:

1. This is not a once off activity but an on-going function due to that fact that any practice is an ever evolving place.
2. Changing a process so that it runs faster doesn't necessarily mean it is now better
3. Changes need to be communicated internally and externally
4. Monitoring and measuring performance is the only way to know if the changes have been effective- be sure you select the correct criteria to measure.

Given the scale of effort required to effectively improve your business processes how can you make short-term improvements? In my opinion the easiest way is to get the people in your practice to understand their roles and responsibilities of all staff in the practice. If you do nothing else you should at least get everyone to document what they do at work- daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annually. Staff should also distinguish between ad-hoc and regular activities.

Once this is done you can at least determine duplication of effort, gaps in service provision, quantity of work done by staff and unnecessary work done. Armed with this information you will definitely be in a better position to make good decisions which in turn will go a long way to providing your clients with an enhanced experience.

If you would like to know more about how optimising your practice's people, process and technology can make your practice more than the sum of its parts, GhostPractice Practice Management's services, or how GhostPractice is driving change in the legal industry feel free to call me on 084 586 6789 or email me on kubenn@korbitec.com.

Regards
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