

Six Tips for Mastering the Attorney-Client Relationship

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As a young professional, how do you lay the foundation to one day transition from the junior member of the team to the person clients call first? In addition to becoming a subject matter expert in your field, there are other steps you can take to distinguish yourself from the pack, gain your clients' trust, expand your practice, and succeed as a counselor and advocate. Here are six tips to mastering the attorney-client relationship:

- 1 Learn the industry from the ground up.** The practice of health law centers on the business of health care. In order to be an effective lawyer in this industry, you need to be a business partner as well as legal counsel. This requires learning the business of health care from the ground up. Keep up to date on health care news in general. AHLA's website has an abundance of excellent resources in the Young Professionals section (<https://www.healthlawyers.org/About/WhoWeAre/Diversity/Pages/YoungProfessionals.aspx>). Go out to coffee with your client and pick their brain on issues like their organization's strategic plan, physician engagement, and patient satisfaction scores. Read AHLA publications like *AHLA Weekly*, *AHLA Connections*, and the *Journal of Health & Life Sciences Law*, as well as other publications like *Modern Health Care*, and subscribe to law firm blogs that deal with issues germane to the health care industry. Learning about the health care industry is a must in order to give effective legal advice, advance your practice, and build rapport with clients.
- 2 Know your client.** This is an obvious step that a lot of professionals miss. When you are meeting your client, do your homework first. Know who the President, CEO, and key executives are. Read any current news about your client. Learn about your client's facility. How many beds do they have? What are the names of the different units? Are there nurses or other staff represented by unions? All of this information is easily accessible online. This shows that you care about your client, and it bolsters your credibility.
- 3 Add value beyond your practice area.** Health care is a heavily regulated industry affected by a wide range of areas of law. As a young professional in this field, you must not only develop your area of expertise, but also pick up a working knowledge of legal areas outside of your comfort zone. Think about other areas of the law that pair well with your practice area, and gain knowledge in those areas. Learn what keeps health care CEOs and GCs up at night. This will help you develop as a practitioner and make you more effective in your own practice. Given the myriad laws and regulations impacting the health care industry, understanding the interplay between them is important. Being able to add value beyond your initial scope of work makes your client see you as an expert and leader.
- 4 Be a resource, not a roadblock.** There is a collective eye roll everywhere when someone states "we have to loop legal in." Lawyers often put the brakes on a company's plans in order to make sure they are legally compliant. We are seen as a roadblock. Young lawyers may reflexively approach a business issue as if they are facing a law school hypothetical and are more inclined to tell clients that they cannot do something. While many times we have to tell our clients "no," think about all of the options available and offer alternatives to your client's proposed course of action. Successful lawyers need business acumen. Demonstrating that you want your client to achieve their desired goal in the most legally compliant way will show your client that you care about their goals.
- 5 "Let me look into that."** As a young professional, you may be nervous that you do not have all of the answers. Sure, you answered your client's question about the Stark Law. But then they asked you a complicated legal question involving Medicaid. You want to give them the right answer, but you don't know what to say. That's ok! Simply say "let me look into that" or "I will find someone who can help." Even if you are not the one who ultimately gives your client the answer, you are the one who has helped them get the right answer.
- 6 Master client development now.** Some young professionals have the misconception that client development is a behemoth that they will tackle down the road. However, client development begins on day one, and it is something that all young professionals can and should master. Many think of client development in terms of getting new clients. However, client development starts with developing the clients you already have. By expanding your knowledge of the industry and the law, you will be able to identify new and different issues that your clients have. Then, you can work to get new business in those areas. Client development is interwoven into all areas of your practice and involves all interactions with your client. It is proving to them that they made the right choice in coming to you and making them want to send you more business. It is them telling others in the industry how great you are.



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