



WHITE PAPER

The recipe for the world's **stickiest clients**

Seven ingredients for client satisfaction and how to
leverage them in your practice



THOMSON REUTERS®

Finding the right ingredients

Keeping legal clients satisfied has always been a mysterious alchemy. Every firm believes it possesses the unique blend of efficiency, expertise, and service that attracts and retains clients for the long term. [New research suggests](#) that there are seven critical elements for elevating client satisfaction:

- Stellar performing lawyers
- Diversity of talent
- Client-centric lawyers
- The client feedback loop
- Innovative approach
- Industry expertise
- Brand affinity

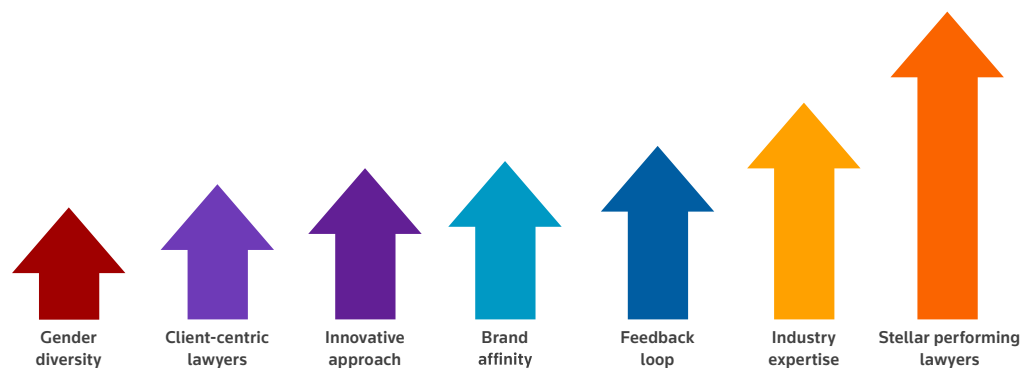


Figure 1: The seven critical elements of client satisfaction

Source: [Thomson Reuters® 2022 state of corporate law departments research](#)

It's challenging to make clients stick. It is especially challenging today with so much competition and the changes in ways of working brought on by advancing technology and the gradual post-pandemic hybrid and return-to-office environments. The seven elements for client satisfaction fall into three broad categories: the staffing mindset, the customer experience, and the perception of your firm's brand.

Learn what really makes clients happy and uncover strategies to implement the key elements in your practice.

The staffing mindset

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the human element of your firm, and how the people you hire can help keep your clients around.

Most industries experienced the “Great Resignation” during or after the COVID-19 pandemic as people got a taste of new, flexible ways of working. Associate turnover rates in law firms hit record high levels — [according to a report from the North Carolina State Bar](#), about 27% of 3,700 Am Law 200 associates said they would leave their current law firm for higher compensation, and 60% said they would consider leaving for a better work-life balance.

The [2021 Law Firm Business Leaders Report](#) found that the three highest risks to law firms’ profitability are lawyer recruitment and retention, poaching of staff by competitors, and increasing associate salaries (in the 2020 survey, talent issues didn’t even rank among the top five risks threatening profitability).

Overall, headcount strategies for law firms are changing — firms are still hiring employees, but there is also some attrition taking place. But in this competitive climate, recruiting and retaining the most talented lawyers remains critical. Consistent excellence makes for sticky clients. [A Thomson Reuters Institute report](#) assessed qualities that lawyers looked for when choosing where to work and found that [talent is more likely to stick](#) in a firm where they feel heard, feel comfortable being themselves, and their potential career path is clear. These characteristics will not change overnight — they are long-term cultural requirements.

Stellar performing lawyers

High-performing lawyers, characterized by notable technical expertise and superior commercial, service, and client relationship skills, help to establish a reputation for your firm by meeting a client’s needs swiftly and repeatedly. Clients who are consistently pleased by their attorneys’ work makes for a strong attorney-client relationship.

The qualities that make for a stand-out lawyer include business acumen, service, expertise, a close client relationship, and a mindset for innovation/cost-effectiveness. It’s not just about their legal knowledge, but also whether they are able to translate that expertise into successful outcomes. While [high-performing lawyers nominated by general counsel](#) rated service as the most important attribute, clients themselves ranked strong business acumen and keen legal expertise much higher when citing what made for a stand-out lawyer.

Q. What do you think makes lawyers, such as yourself, stand out to clients?

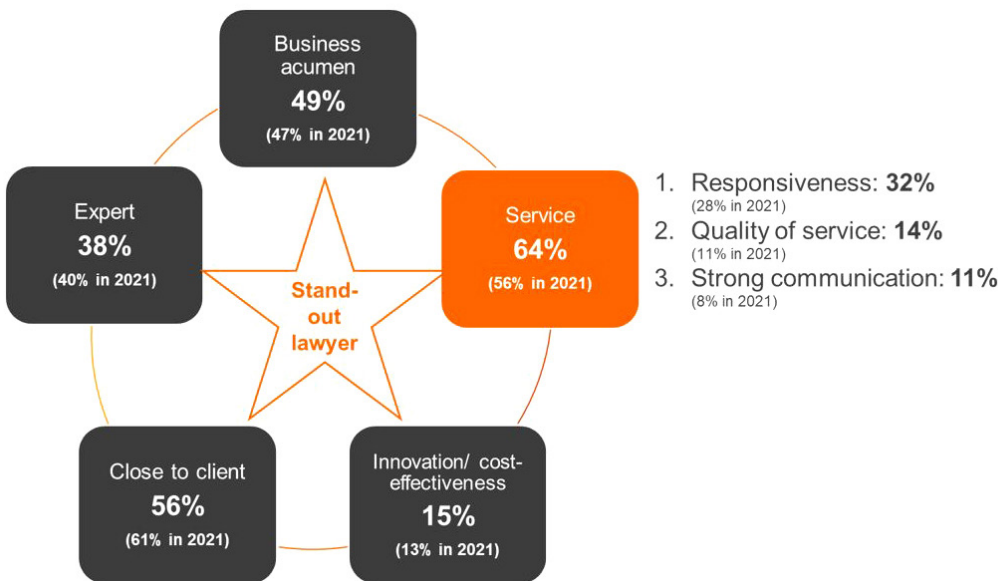


Figure 2: The qualities of a stand-out lawyer

Source: [Thomson Reuters Legal Talent Deep Dives: Why do stand-out lawyers think they stand out to clients?](#)

[Read more](#) about why stand-out lawyers think they stand out to clients

When you recruit talent, are potential hires talking only about their expertise and experience — or are they talking about how they apply these to achieve the client's goals? This can be a key factor that distinguishes a high-performing lawyer.

Our research shows that one key way for law firms to optimize revenue from existing clients is by striving to have at least [three stand-out lawyers on the client team](#). One stand-out lawyer can double one's share of legal spend; whereas a collaborative team of three stand-out lawyers can double that again, making an enormous difference to a firm's return on investment.

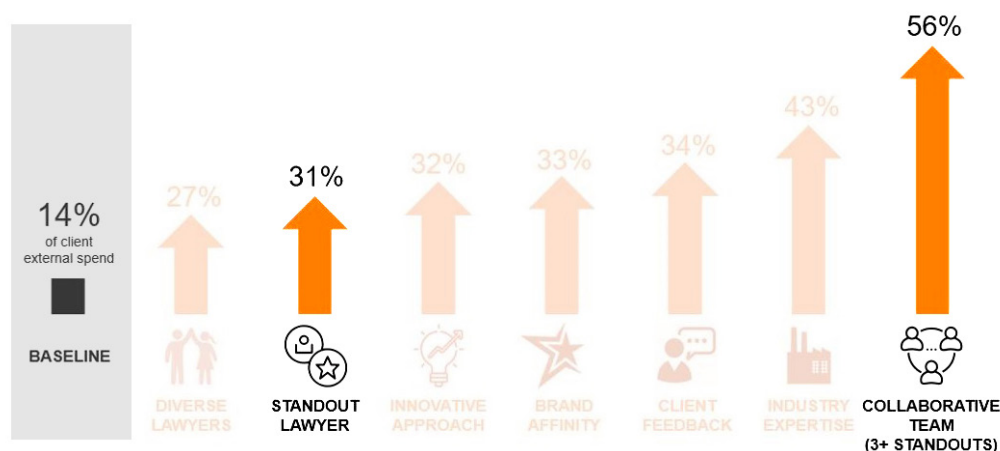


Figure 3: How stand-out lawyers can increase legal spend

Source: [Thomson Reuters Legal Talent Deep Dives: How just 3 stand-out lawyers can result in a 4-fold increase in firms' share of legal spend](#)

Qualitative research indicates that the bottom line is particularly positively affected when those three stand-out lawyers are spread across different work types. The most successful collaborative teams are defined by a lead relationship partner who spearheads the relationship and has a deep understanding of the client's business and their overarching business objectives. This relationship orchestrator can help direct the client to the right resource within their law firm.

Diversity of talent

Having diverse talent in your firm from a variety of backgrounds such as areas of expertise or lived experience can set your firm up for success. A broad range of talent can open your firm up to new business while matching your clients' [diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\) initiatives and values](#).

Although a disappointingly low percentage of law firm leaders put diversity requirements in place, a diverse legal team still has a positive impact on share of spend. Clients (sometimes unintentionally) spend more with law firms that have a diverse team — typically because their lawyers consider matters from a multiplicity of perspectives, providing the client with commercial advice that's more practical.

Client-centric lawyers

A client-centric lawyer is focused on the more holistic needs of the client across multiple work types. They ensure that they're helping the client to achieve the big-picture goals they're trying to accomplish. Clients value transparency, trust, communication, efficiency, and timeliness from their lawyers, and when lawyers put the right experience in place, they are less likely to leave.

Client-centric lawyers possess many of the same qualities as stellar performing lawyers, but these individuals also go the extra mile to focus on the client. By directing effort toward building a one-to-one relationship, they establish a powerful bond of trust — resulting in a positive uptick (31% — see Figure 3) in how much the client will spend with their law firm. These lawyers create a halo effect that benefits the firm at large through inspiring trust by association.

Key human elements that make clients stay:

- A firm where talented lawyers want to work
- Collaboration between high-performing lawyers
- Lawyers who not only know their stuff but how to apply it to help their client achieve the best possible outcomes
- Constant, consistent, relevant communication
- Diversity of perspectives

The customer experience

Today's law firms face many pressures. Clients are demanding greater visibility and transparency into legal processes, and many clients are consolidating their resources by reducing the number of law firms they work with.

Firms wanting stickier clients can and should focus on elevating the customer experience. This means focusing on two elements in particular: an innovative approach and feedback loops.

Innovative approach

An innovative approach can create a great customer experience, one that prioritizes the transparency and efficiency that clients appreciate. Innovative law firms combine technology, process improvement, and a client-focused approach to reengineer their legal service delivery into a competitive advantage.

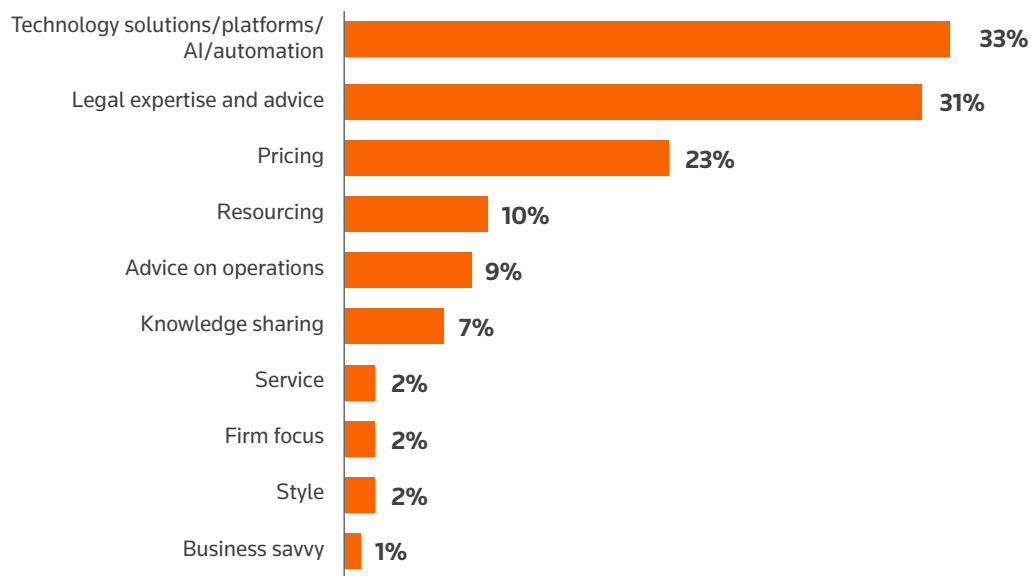


Figure 4: Innovative solutions that helped solve challenges or achieve objectives

Source: [Thomson Reuters 2022 state of corporate law departments research](#)

Forward-thinking legal project management (LPM) tools such as Thomson Reuters [HighQ](#) enable law firms to differentiate themselves and add value to client relationships beyond the legal work they produce — delivering legal services more efficiently and strengthening relationships by improving every aspect of the client experience.

The right LPM tool [can help your firm](#):

- Deliver engaging content experiences and client portals
- Create a single source of truth for legal information with real-time updates, activities, tasks, and much more
- Easily manage, share, and collaborate on sensitive documents and content in secure project workspaces
- Quickly set up workflows to manage projects and automate time-consuming manual tasks such as those associated with M&A (merger and acquisition) transactions, complex litigation, and other matters
- Visualize and share project status, budget, and other important metrics, providing the client with full transparency

[Case study](#): How HighQ enabled a firm to enhance their value-added services to clients and secure new client wins

A UK Top 100 law firm that had just secured a major new client deal needed a platform up and running very quickly that allowed them to securely share files with third parties and control access rights. They needed a secure virtual deal room with over 700 documents uploaded and indexed — potentially time-consuming and labor-intensive work — on day one.

Within four days, HighQ and the firm had a fully branded deal room set up with all the relevant documents uploaded and indexed for their client.

“The document upload couldn’t have been simpler — we imported the documents into the new deal room and HighQ Collaborate built out the index. The whole process took about 10 minutes, which allowed us to meet the client’s expectations, get the deal over the line and really secure that client relationship.”

“The platform is very secure, easy to use, and granular — and its ability to create indexes through automation really made HighQ stand out from the other solutions we looked at.”

– Dave Eagle, Head of IT, Royds Withy King

Employing the right processes in your work is as important to innovation as having the right technology. Proactivity like scenario planning or risk mitigation planning can give clients the protection and certainty that builds trust. In addition to adopting the best technology, it takes human initiative and an individualized touch to engage clients. Walking them through all the potential risks that their company can face, and setting up if-then sequences that enable them to react more quickly and effectively sets your firm apart from competitors in the marketplace.

A truly innovative approach requires the right technology and the right processes working together to delight and serve your client. HighQ can help your firm stay ahead of competition by engendering an innovative and open mindset.

Establishing a feedback loop

It's important to know how your clients truly feel. This is an element that may be easily forgotten, but it is beneficial to both parties — helping you improve how you work and letting your client know that you care about their experiences. Actively listening, inviting regular input, and being open to client feedback can go a long way, helping to develop a strong client-firm relationship. [Legal operations tools](#) can facilitate requesting and obtaining feedback from your clients — efficiently and securely.

Law firms which conduct formal client feedback programs with their clients see increased results, whether in the form of an improved relationship across the board or a higher share of spend from that client.

Even more important than gathering feedback is acting on the results. Make sure you're collecting a robust sampling of feedback and looking at the results both from the individual client's perspective and that of the bigger picture for your firm. Based on feedback results, are there any weaknesses across the firm that you need to address? Common pain points to look out for in client feedback include value for money, efficiency, and proactive communication. What should you be doing as a firm to address common weaknesses across multiple client relationships and safeguard your business? The ability to be open to feedback, whether positive or constructive, and being willing to change based on those results emerges as a top priority and helps you build a reputation as a client-centric firm that listens.

Key customer experience elements that clients look for:

- A technological approach that is [innovative, intuitive, and seamless](#)
- Effective foresight and strategic forward planning
- Proactive problem-solving
- Smooth processes that enable quick, honest feedback
- Evidence of acting on client feedback

The perception of your brand

Industry expertise and brand affinity must work in concert with the five elements already discussed to reinforce the perception of your brand.

Industry expertise

A team that is aware of their client's industry and how it affects their client, and shares values that resonate with their clients, is more likely to retain clients and expand its reach. A positive client experience garners potential word-of-mouth about your firm, equating to more business emanating from those clients that have stuck.

As [stand-out lawyers](#) strive to help their clients above and beyond the norm of technical expertise, they expand their own horizons by, for example, moving into areas of specialized knowledge.

The perception of a firm's industry expertise exists wholly in the eyes of the client. Firms considered industry-aware must show a strong understanding and anticipation of the needs typical to a client's industry. A firm specializing in pharma law, for example, needs to be strong on M&A and transactions, financing for pharma deals, intellectual property law, and all other work types that are particularly important to serving pharma clients holistically. Taking the broader perspective, a variety of industry specializations across a firm enables it to navigate all areas of legal need that fall within their client's industry.

Many firms are changing their structure to align with this model, moving away from the practice area approach and towards an industry-focused approach. This allows them to build more institutionalized client relationships, which have greater longevity. Once litigation is completed, the business relationship can and should continue beyond an individual matter. Look for ways your firm can provide ongoing industry expertise in areas beyond litigation — such as contracts, labor and employment, finance work, etc.

Not all firms are evolving this way — it is dependent on individual strategy and the direction an industry is headed. As another example, some firms that historically have specialized in the energy and oil industry may begin to build pillars around three or four different industries — covering emerging bases such as renewables.

Specializing in anything over four industries can dilute a firm's approach, at which point they may no longer be considered industry experts. It is better to stay focused on demonstrating in-depth industry expertise, bringing your firm's collective knowledge of your clients' industry to bear in helping them navigate their various needs and then sharing those learnings. This is a more scalable approach to business because most clients within a specific industry will have very similar needs. There will be nuanced differences, but their requirements will align in the main as they are all subject to the same regulations and will be looking to grow their business in much the same way. This enables a firm to build a template for working with clients across one industry.

Brand affinity

[A great reputation increases brand affinity](#) and leads to long, healthy professional relationships. A brand is an implicit promise firms make to their stakeholders, while reputation is the perception of how a firm is delivering on that promise. Your brand needs definition, its own unique personality that enables you to stand out from the crowd. The key lies in understanding your audience and selling them a message consistent with your brand, your expertise, and your market.

We ask buyers which firms they most favor and why. What they are looking for can vary from client to client — what technology buyers favor in law firms will differ from what manufacturing companies look for, based on their unique needs as different organizations — but there are core themes around what drives affinity. It's hard to be a favorite firm if you don't have the necessary expertise, but that really is the bare minimum — clients can turn to most law firms for the legal expertise that they need. More nuanced drivers of favorability like service, business savvy, or the value or pricing that a firm offers are all stronger differentiators because they vary from firm to firm.

To build sticky client relationships, lean into what makes your law firm stand head and shoulders above the plethora of other options a client has.

[Read more](#) about HighQ and how it can help you push the seven elements (or request a demo)

What can your firm do to keep clients around for the long haul?

The key ingredient for longevity in a client-firm relationship is maintaining contact with clients and providing them with an experience that is both personal and helpful.

Lawyers' tendency to view their work in a transactional way frequently stalls relationships — assuming that once a matter is done, the client will call again the next time they need legal assistance. But in this fast-paced market, other law firms may be reaching out to your clients, so you need to be far more proactive in maintaining lines of communication even when there is no active matter work.

Schedule routine check-ins with your clients, send quarterly or monthly updates — whatever makes the most sense for the firm and that relationship. Curate whatever you're sharing with clients carefully, targeting them only with information that is relevant to them so that your communication stands out. It is vital to maintain contact so that when your client runs into another legal matter, they call you. If you're not one of the first five firms a client is thinking of, your likelihood of getting hired for the next matter drops precipitously. Platforms like HighQ can help lawyers to [check in with their clients](#) regularly and pertinently, rather than spamming them with unindividuated, irrelevant content.

The practice of law is a relationship-driven business, and it is crucial to maintain those relationships. How you accomplish that is becoming ever more nuanced and more competitive as law firms get better at putting information into the hands of clients.

It starts at your firm. Clients want to stick around when they feel an affinity with a firm's brand, values, and capabilities. You can establish trust by recruiting lawyers who are diverse, client-centric, and high-performing, with a talent for relationship building and a deep understanding of your clients' business challenges. You should work to build collaborative teams with industry experience and knowledge, who use innovative processes to support your clients and [operations technology](#) to provide the best, most open customer experience, drive productivity, and maintain lines of communication. With the right mix, your firm can have the world's stickiest clients.



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