

## Do You Have Apology Deficit Disorder?

Carol has chosen David to represent her in preparing for what she expects to be a contentious, although straightforward divorce. She hasn't filed yet, but she has already paid over \$20,000 in a retainer and fees. As they explore all aspects of her financial and custody situations she has requested regular meetings every couple of weeks to both keep her informed and to be sure David is working with the most accurate information.

Today's meeting has a full agenda of details they need to address; 20 minutes into their meeting the conference room phone rings. David excuses himself saying, "I'm sorry, but I need to answer this."

Carol gives a dismissive wave of her hand and says, "Of course!"

After a "Yes?" And a "Please wait a couple of seconds and then connect me," David covers the phone and turns back to Carol. "I'm really sorry, but I need to take a few minutes to speak with a client about a time critical issue. I will only be a few minutes." Carol is content to quietly wait feeling assured that David has always respected her time.

The call lasts about five minutes and as David hangs up he turns to Carol and explains, "I'm sorry about that. That was notification that the case I was preparing to try in court tomorrow just got settled. Now, let's get back to your case and be sure we get everything covered that we need to. Again, Carol, my apologies for interrupting; this is important information we're covering today."

Carol leaves the meeting feeling satisfied and appreciative that David is on her side. She wonders what it would feel like if she didn't have an attorney with his concern and respect for her. She has heard some real horror stories from her friends.

Ted, a regular tennis partner of Carol is in the middle of a complicated business litigation and has told Carol how frustrating his attorneys are. Granted Ted's case is much more complex and has already cost him over \$100,000, but he feels frustrated and disrespected most of the time.

Yesterday, after their match, he told Carol about the latest incident. He had been trying for almost a month to get an appointment, or more correctly to have his attorney keep an appointment and not cancel it a day or two before.

He finally got a 90 minute block of the lead attorney's time, but only a week before the trial was scheduled to start. Thirty minutes into his appointment his attorney took a call and said to Ted, "I'll be right back," and left the room. Ted tried to keep working his way through the material he needed to review, but didn't feel he understood it unless he could get his questions answered.

After 15 minutes of solitary frustration the attorney walked back into the room and said, “So where we? Oh, yes, let’s talk about the …” If it hadn’t been so close to trial, and if he didn’t have \$100,000 invested in his current attorneys, Ted would have quit in a heartbeat.

Ted explained that he’s sure the attorney hasn’t any idea what he is feeling or thinking. Even when Ted acts irritated she just pushes ahead, and he admits he isn’t that good at confronting people. So Ted is doing the only thing that he feels comfortable doing; he’s bad mouthing his attorney to everyone he knows and secretly hopes it kills her good reputation.

What’s a simple apology worth? Do you know how to tender an effective apology? How many apologies have you skipped over in the last few months? What did those oversights cost you in referrals?

What are your clients really thinking? Do you know the tricks to asking them so that you get a truthful answer? Whose time is really more valuable, yours or your client’s? Can you imagine they don’t know how you would really answer?

Client acquirement, retention and referrals are people skills that most professionals overestimate their proficiency in. Those who are best at client relationships are the ones who most often approach me for coaching to further enhance their practices. Would your practice benefit from more clients?

Please contact me for additional information or an appointment for a “Client Skills Review.”