



Are you listening?

In 2015, Winckworth Sherwood implemented a comprehensive client listening programme. Deborah Shell explains why and the benefits it delivered.



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Client feedback is a powerful tool to understand a client's requirements and needs, helping to make informed decisions on how to service, retain and extend relationships.

We have worked with many of our clients for a number of years and felt we had built strong relationships, but we did not have a formal programme to assess the strength and health of those relationships in an objective manner and with a focus on service improvement. Our firm continues to grow at a rate of 10% per annum therefore the need for a formalised programme for new and existing clients became ever more apparent.

The arrival of a new marketing and business development director, Adam Seymour, with a strong track record in delivering client listening programmes, provided the stimulus for that formal programme.

At Winckworth Sherwood we set out to understand five key factors:

- What clients value;
- How we perform against those criteria;
- Where we are good;
- Where we could do better; and
- What is needed to deliver an ongoing first class service.

How we did it

One of the first significant decisions to take was whether to conduct the programme ourselves, or bring in a specialist third party. There are advantages to both routes.

We opted for the specialist third party route, appointing an independent consultant, Robin Dicks, The Thriving Company, experienced in drawing out opinions and probing where necessary.



"It's important to gain really actionable information, while at the same time ensuring that the process is enjoyable and convenient for the client and that colleagues value and use the insights gained," explains Robin.

It was felt that the use of a third party would remove bias allowing interviewees to be more open about their true feelings towards the firm. It can be difficult to have truly independent discussions with a partner who you work closely with on a day-by-day basis.

We also needed to set feedback targets to ensure we had enough data to draw upon to make comparisons. These targets included completing 50 interviews within a 10-month period and setting performance targets around NPS Net Promoter Scores (promoters, passives and detractors) as well as target scores across specific areas of service quality.

Partner buy-in

Securing buy-in from across the partnership is critical to ensuring the success of any change programme, and client feedback is no exception. Our client listening initiative was supported by a strong internal communications programme including video, email, presentations at team meetings, presentations at partner meetings, and,

following the start of the programme, a three-minute video showcasing the first seven client interviews. This video shared with the firm the insight clients bring and the benefits of the wider client listening programme.

In order to maintain momentum, we continue to engage with the business regularly asking for appropriate clients for feedback.

The results

Perhaps the most important lesson from the exercise is that you don't always know your clients as well as you think you do. There are always opportunities to improve service. The first year of the programme has made our business less afraid of asking for ways to improve and quicker at executing those improvements, both for specific clients and across the business. The programme also feeds into our training, development and recruitment programmes ensuring we attract, develop and retain the right skills for future client needs.

Whilst we have focused on how to improve our service, the process has also presented us with multiple cross sell opportunities, as well as opportunities to introduce our clients to useful contacts from across our client base.



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Impact on the firm

Having run this particular programme for a year we are delighted with the results so far. Our client satisfaction scores are increasing and we have been able to introduce many of our fee earners to new contacts at existing client organisations, creating cross selling opportunities that otherwise would not have been possible.

Everyone in the firm has a part to play in delivering great client service: from answering the phone, sending out bills, providing value added service, commercial legal advice all underpinned by joined-up communication.

We have a far greater understanding of our key clients and are better able to act as a strategic business partner rather than just another service provider.

Robin says "We have formed a really successful partnership with Winckworth Sherwood, which has been diligent in securing the benefits available from a client feedback programme".

Testimonials

When we interview clients we ask, when appropriate, for testimonials, and clients have been very happy to do this for us. It is great to get that endorsement approved and in writing from a client, this really helps with morale and keeps us striving to deliver the best service possible

Some of our recent testimonials include:

- "We get a great service. Good value for money...they are responsive, commercial, professional and they deliver."
- "Highly skilled providing excellent advice."
- "We have been working with the Winckworth Sherwood team for some time. We've always liked their ability to understand our business requirements. I would describe them as knowledgeable and well-rounded – if we were thrown a curve-ball they would be one of the people we would go to."

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