



THINK LIKE A  
**CLIENT**



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PLEASANT DILIGENTLY ORGANIZED  
PRACTICAL MEDIATION  
CONCISE THOROUGH  
RESPONSIVE  
EFFICIENT GENUINE ETHICAL  
FIGHTER RELIABLE BRILLIANT  
INTEGRITY POSITIVE  
PROFESSIONAL  
PERSONAL CLEAR HAPPY

# THINK LIKE A CLIENT

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INSTITUTE *for the* ADVANCEMENT  
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## **IAALS—Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System**

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IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, is a national, independent research center at the University of Denver dedicated to facilitating continuous improvement and advancing excellence in the American legal system. We are a “think tank” that goes one step further—we are practical and solution-oriented. Our mission is to forge innovative and practical solutions to problems within the American legal system. By leveraging a unique blend of empirical and legal research, innovative solutions, broad-based collaboration, communications, and ongoing measurement in strategically selected, high-impact areas, IAALS is empowering others with the knowledge, models, and will to advance a more accessible, efficient, and accountable American legal system.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Executive Summary . . . . .	1
Introduction . . . . .	2
Methods . . . . .	4
Results . . . . .	6
Communications . . . . .	6
Demeanor . . . . .	9
Business Model . . . . .	11
Lawyering . . . . .	13
Tenacity . . . . .	16
The Client Perspective Summarized . . . . .	17
Tying in the Lawyer Perspective . . . . .	18
Conclusion . . . . .	19
Appendix . . . . .	20

# DEDICATED TO ALLI GERKMAN

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I still can't believe I was lucky enough to have known Alli Gerkman.

She was awe-inspiring in her intellect, her compassion, her fierceness, her unwavering integrity, and—maybe most of all—her humor. Even in the face of an illness that she knew would eventually win, she laughed. Constantly.

On August 31, 2019, Alli passed away. But she left something so important behind. She left us with a sense of purpose and urgency—the sense that we must do as much good in this world as possible in the limited time we have. So, we carry on.

I dedicate this report to you, my friend, Alli Gerkman.

*“We build friendships, we smile at strangers, we fall in love, we build families, we shape the people we want to be, we shape the world we want to live in, we wear white before Memorial Day. Every day, we choose how we will live.”*

*Every single one of you is going to die. Actually cease to exist. And you won't have a choice in how or when. And you should sit with that. Because that reveals a far more powerful truth. You are alive. And while you almost certainly will have no say in how you die, you do get to choose in every single moment of this beautiful, beautiful life, just how you will live.”*

—Alli Gerkman, 2016

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- James Swearingen and Caitlin Anderson for their tireless work in coding the data.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding what clients want and expect from their lawyers is imperative for the provision of high-quality legal services, as well as for lawyers' success in the legal profession. Furthermore, there exists a well-established and frequently lamented gap between the legal needs of the public and the provision of legal services from the profession. While we have anecdotal evidence that presents glimpses of answers to our questions about what clients value, there is a dearth of empirical evidence to support firm conclusions. IAALS' *Think Like a Client* project represents a first step for the profession in developing a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of what is important to clients.

We worked with Avvo.com—an entity dedicated to providing detailed information about lawyers so consumers can make the best choices for themselves when hiring lawyers—in obtaining more than a decade's worth of client reviews of lawyers. Indeed, we started with nearly 700,000 reviews in our data set. After implementing a set of inclusion criteria and identifying a random sample of reviews, we conducted qualitative analysis on 2,232 client reviews.

Our findings tell a story about what clients value in their lawyers, and that story includes far more than just traditional legal skills.

## Communicator

- Prompt responses
- Proactive status updates
- Explains the case
- Available to the client

## Lawyering

- Knowledge of the law
- Effective negotiation and advocacy
- Quality legal advice
- Dedication to the case and client
- In-court advocacy



# THINK LIKE A CLIENT

## Tenacity

- Sees the case through
- Diligence
- Detail-oriented
- Strong work ethic

## Business

- Produces best outcomes
- Provide value
- Honest and flexible billing

## Demeanor

- Behaves with integrity, honesty, ethics
- Professional
- Kind
- Empathetic
- Courteous and respectful

The *Think Like a Client* project builds on IAALS' previous work on its *Foundations for Practice* project, which collected more than 24,000 survey responses from legal practitioners in a wide array of practice settings and from all 50 states about what new lawyers need to be successful. The *Foundations for Practice* survey results illuminated the fact that new lawyers need a broad combination of legal skills, professional competencies, and characteristics—that is, they need to embody the *whole lawyer*. Of course, there are differences in what practitioners and clients view as important in lawyers. But the message is clear: successful lawyers must demonstrate more than traditional legal skills. Law schools will always have a duty to teach students to think like lawyers. Just as important, though, is teaching law students to think like a client.

# INTRODUCTION

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Gaining a thorough understanding of what clients want and expect from their lawyers is essential to the lawyer's ability to provide quality legal services and, ultimately, to the lawyer's success in the legal profession. There is no shortage of anecdotal advice from lawyers or customer service recommendations from bar associations, but there is an informational vacuum where the client perspective is concerned. While there is a growing call for this information in the legal profession, there is one primary, confounding obstacle in gathering data on what clients value in their lawyers; specifically, there is considerable difficulty involved in identifying individual clients from whom to gather such information. While some law firms and legal organizations collect client feedback and satisfaction data, these efforts are often informal and are rarely shared externally.

The need to better understand what clients need is amplified by the well-established, considerable gap between legal needs of the public and the provision of legal services from the profession. For instance, research indicates that there are a great many people in the United States who, when faced with a problem that could be addressed through the civil legal system, choose not to engage in the legal process.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, very often those who do decide to resolve their civil legal issues do so without hiring a lawyer. Indeed, one study showed that around three-quarters of civil cases filed in state courts involve at least one self-represented party.<sup>2</sup> In IAALS' 2016 qualitative study of self-representation in family cases,<sup>3</sup> a sizeable majority of interviewees reflected that they wanted a lawyer, but that hiring one was cost-prohibitive. The perception of the high cost associated with hiring a lawyer certainly contributes to the gap, but so do other issues such as the "social construction of legality," the concept that people often do not seek legal counsel because they do not think of their issues as legal problems.<sup>4</sup>

There is no panacea to resolve the variety of issues contributing to the gap between legal needs of clients and legal service provision—narrowing the gap will require a multifaceted set of solutions. Still, there is no doubt that a crucial step is ensuring that the legal profession understands and is responsive to what clients want. A clear understanding of what clients value in lawyers will not only help lawyers connect with and serve their clients, it will also improve the quality and scope of legal services for clients themselves.

This project is a jumping-off point for providing the profession with insight into the client perspective. Using client reviews posted on a leading online legal services marketplace, we delved into a decade's worth of client feedback, spanning across practice areas and geographic locations. With this information, we can better understand where there is overlap between the conventional wisdom and what clients actually value, as well as where we have more to learn.

## Avvo

Avvo is an entity dedicated to providing consumers with detailed information on lawyers so people can make the choices that are right for them. It is an online repository of information about lawyers across the United States. Each lawyer listed on Avvo has a profile page, which provides information about that lawyer's practice, how much the lawyer charges for services, contact information, and client ratings and reviews. Clients post reviews on Avvo of lawyers with whom they have worked to, at least in part, encourage or discourage others who are considering whether to hire a particular lawyer. So, very often, clients will include information about precisely *why* they were pleased or displeased with their representation. Such information lends itself to helping us develop an understanding of what clients value in their lawyers.

In order to facilitate the most robust possible analysis, we worked with the Avvo team to obtain a complete data set—that is, the nearly 700,000 client reviews that had been posted to the website from its inception in 2007 through early 2017. Equipped with these client reviews, we were able to explore the client perspective using a qualitative analysis strategy.

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1 Rebecca Sandefur, *The Impact of Counsel: An Analysis of Empirical Evidence*, 56-60 SEATTLE J. FOR SOC. JUST. 51 (2010).

2 CIVIL JUSTICE INITIATIVE, THE LANDSCAPE OF CIVIL LITIGATION IN STATE COURTS, NAT'L CTR. FOR STATE CTS., STATE JUSTICE INST. iv (2015), <https://www.ncsc.org/~media/Files/PDF/Research/CivilJusticeReport-2015.ashx>.

3 NATALIE KNOWLTON, LOGAN CORNETT, CORINA GERETY & JANET DROBINSKE, INST. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE AM. LEGAL SYS., CASES WITHOUT COUNSEL: RESEARCH ON EXPERIENCES OF SELF-REPRESENTATION IN U.S. FAMILY COURT (2016), [https://iaals.du.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cases\\_without\\_counsel\\_research\\_report.pdf](https://iaals.du.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cases_without_counsel_research_report.pdf).

4 Rebecca L. Sandefur, *Money Isn't Everything: Understanding Moderate Income Households' Use of Lawyers' Services*, in MIDDLE INCOME ACCESS TO JUST. 222 (Michael Trebilcock et al. eds., 2012).



# Understanding the Data

The procedure we employed does not allow us to draw absolute conclusions about the client perspective, especially with regard to the relative importance of each aspect of the attorney-client relationship detailed in this report. For instance, we could not definitively say that providing status updates is more important to clients than case outcomes (or vice versa). What we *can* say, and what we do say, is that based on the prevalence in the data of each component of attorney performance discussed below, each of them appears to have an impact on the client's experience. We view our qualitative approach here as an initial step in developing a full, evidence-based understanding of the things clients value in their lawyers. We hope that this study will serve as a catalyst for future research into the client perspective.

Before moving on, there are a few specific limitations of our approach that are worth explicitly mentioning. First, we must recognize that Avvo reviewers are a self-selected group. Because the reviews are not systematically collected, the set of reviews from which we pulled our sample is likely not representative of the broad population of clients.

Second, because reviews are published anonymously, it is possible that some of the reviews are not genuine. To mitigate this possibility, as described in the Methods section below, we limited our sample to reviews posted by registered users.

Finally, qualitative studies generally deal with data gathered through structured interviews, focus groups, or other methods in which researchers probe about specific aspects related to a topic. Although Avvo prompts reviewers to provide details and specifics in their reviews,<sup>5</sup> the site does not prompt reviewers to address any particular topics. This means that, through the approach employed in this study, we were not able to dive as deeply into the individual topics of interest as we would have been if we used more traditional methods; however, we emphasize that this study represents an initial effort at understanding the qualities and skills that are important to clients, rather than the final word on this matter.

Another noteworthy issue is that the reviews on Avvo are overwhelmingly positive. In fact, within the overall data set (that is, within the nearly 700,000 total reviews), the average rating for all lawyers is 4.67 out of 5 and about 92% of all ratings were 3 or higher. This may suggest that, instead of these ratings representing the overall sentiment of all clients, those who post on Avvo tend to be pleased with their lawyer's service. However, our goal is not to understand how satisfied average clients are with their attorneys; rather, it is to better understand what attributes make clients satisfied—or not—with their lawyers. The fact that the respondents skewed toward the positive does not compromise our goal of understanding what clients value in their lawyers. As a final note on the data, the reviews (both in the sample and quoted below) largely reflect feedback in the litigation context.



"We view our qualitative approach here as an initial step in developing a full, evidence-based understanding of the things clients value in their lawyers."

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5 Avvo provides specific review guidelines encouraging reviewers to provide specific, helpful, fact-based reviews. The instructions given to Avvo reviewers on the posting screen follow:

- Avvo only allows reviews for your attorney. Please do not leave a review for a lawyer you did not hire or consult with.
- Be specific. Explain what your lawyer did (or failed to do) with your case. We will only accept reviews that clearly indicate that you contacted consulted with, or hired the attorney.
- ...but not too specific. Leave out any personally identifiable information (e.g., your name or email address).
- Be helpful, not spiteful. Do not post hostile or insulting content.
- Stick to the facts. Reviews that contain unsupported accusations will not be approved.

Avvo provides further guidance in their community guidelines: [https://www.avvo.com/support/community\\_guidelines](https://www.avvo.com/support/community_guidelines)

# METHODS

## Sample

Avvo provided us with all 669,255 reviews posted to the website between May 7, 2007, and March 1, 2017. The sheer volume of reviews required us to draw a representative sample from the full data set. To that end, we first identified criteria for a review to be included in the sample, then we developed a strategy for stratifying the sample based upon the practice area in which the review was posted.

### *Criteria for Inclusion in Sample*

#### Criteria for Inclusion in Sample:

1. Review must be by registered user
2. Review must contain codable information
3. Review must be posted by the actual client

In order to be eligible for inclusion in our sample, a review had to meet three inclusion criteria. First, as noted, the review must have been posted by a registered user. Avvo allows anyone who visits the website to post lawyer reviews, even those who do not create an account on the site. While this strategy undoubtedly has certain advantages for Avvo's business model, in an effort to include only the most honest, thoughtful reviews, we limited our sample to registered user reviews. While we cannot be sure that this criterion eliminates frivolous reviews, it stands to reason that those willing to go through the effort to register for an account on the site might be less likely to post a review on a whim.

Second, reviews had to be at least 10 characters long. We reasoned that reviews shorter than that would be unlikely to yield usable information.<sup>6</sup> To further address this concern, during the coding process, we removed and replaced any reviews that did not contain any codable information.

For example, a review that simply stated, "This attorney is amazing," provides no insight into *why* the attorney is amazing—and would be removed from the sample and replaced with a codable review.

Finally, we only included reviews posted by the clients themselves,<sup>7</sup> not proxies. Within the sample, there were occasions where it was clear that the reviewer was not the client. For example, one review read, "I was impressed with the way [this lawyer], attorney for the plaintiff, approached the case in court. . . . It was clear to me, as part of the audience, that the client benefitted from [the lawyer's] good, honest, loyal advice." Because we wanted to include only feedback directly from clients, we removed and replaced such proxy reviews.

### *Practice Areas*

The original data set indicated the practice area in which each review was posted.<sup>8</sup> In total, the reviews were categorized into 20 broad practice areas. However, the practice areas are not mutually exclusive—for instance, the Lawsuits and Disputes category has clear overlap with other practice areas. Still, we wanted to ensure that each of the practice areas was adequately represented in our sample. In order to achieve this, we stratified the sample to include proportions of reviews within each practice area comparable to the proportions present in the overall data set. However, some practice areas contained relatively few reviews, so we set the minimum number of reviews in the sample to 40 from any single practice area. A full breakdown of practice areas within the broader data and within our sample appears in the Appendix.

After applying our criteria for inclusion,<sup>9</sup> we narrowed the overall data set to 253,870 reviews. Our final sample for coding and analysis included a total of 2,232 reviews.

6 The shortest review that was actually included in the sample was 24 characters long.

7 We made exceptions to this criterion when appropriate; for example, if a parent reviewed a lawyer hired for their minor child, we would not exclude that review from the sample.

8 Practice areas indicated in our data set were determined by the lawyer's self-identified largest focus in practice. Thus, it is possible that some reviews actually related to a different practice area than the one indicated in our data. However, we placed little emphasis in our analysis on practice area, so this approach in assigning practice areas does not impact our results.

9 Note that we were not able to identify proxy reviews at the outset—those were identified and replaced during the coding process.

## Coding and Analysis

We developed our initial coding scheme based on the 147 foundations presented in the *Foundations for Practice* survey,<sup>10</sup> a national survey of lawyers that IAALS conducted in 2014 to understand what new lawyers need to be successful, especially immediately out of law school; the Tying in the Lawyer Perspective section below discusses the *Foundations for Practice* project in more detail.<sup>11</sup> These 147 foundations represent a large compendium of legal skills, professional competencies, and personal characteristics. As expected, though, these foundations did not cover the full spectrum of topics described by clients. For instance, clients frequently referred to issues regarding cost, outcome, and the lawyer explaining the case to the client—none of which appear in the *Foundations for Practice* survey. Where appropriate, we added codes for these additional topics. Conversely, clients did not mention many of the foundations presented in the *Foundations for Practice* survey. For example, none of the reviews discussed the lawyer’s ability to maintain a work-life balance. For obvious reasons, that was not the client’s concern. Ultimately, we used 124 codes in the analysis of our sample. The complete list of codes is in the Appendix.

Most reviews contained multiple pieces of codable information. For instance, a single review might contain references to the lawyer’s knowledgeability, communication skills, and integrity. In these cases, we coded each portion of the review accordingly. Once we completed coding for all reviews in the sample,<sup>12</sup> we queried the data for each code in order to identify themes.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout this report, we rely on quotes from the reviews to demonstrate examples for each theme we observed. Where necessary, we have made edits to the original text to remove names and personal information—both for the reviewer and the reviewed attorney—as well as to correct typos and minor grammatical or punctuation errors. Some of the reviews express unverified factual assumptions (about, for example, variations on lawyer responsiveness based on firm size). We have not edited or commented about them.

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10 In qualitative data analysis, coding is the process through which the data is categorized. The coding scheme refers to the list of codes used.

11 ALI GERKMAN & LOGAN CORNETT, INST. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE AM. LEGAL SYS., FOUNDATIONS FOR PRACTICE: THE WHOLE LAWYER AND THE CHARACTER QUOTIENT (2016) [HEREINAFTER *The Whole Lawyer and the Character Quotient*], [https://iaals.du.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/foundations\\_for\\_practice\\_whole\\_lawyer\\_character\\_quotient.pdf](https://iaals.du.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/foundations_for_practice_whole_lawyer_character_quotient.pdf); ALI GERKMAN & LOGAN CORNETT, INST. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE AM. LEGAL SYS., FOUNDATIONS FOR PRACTICE: HIRING THE WHOLE LAWYER: EXPERIENCE MATTERS (2017) [HEREINAFTER *Hiring the Whole Lawyer*], [https://iaals.du.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/foundations\\_for\\_practice\\_hiring\\_the\\_whole\\_lawyer.pdf](https://iaals.du.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/foundations_for_practice_hiring_the_whole_lawyer.pdf).

12 Two members of the research team coded all reviews in the sample. In order to promote consistency across coders, we employed an informal inter-rater reliability strategy. Specifically, the two coders coded ten randomly selected reviews once per week and addressed any areas of divergence at a weekly meeting. In addition, the research team discussed specific questions or areas of confusion as they arose.

13 We used NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software to code each review in the dataset.

# RESULTS

The sections below detail the most prominent themes that emerged from our analysis. Specifically, we have included in this analysis all codes that appeared in 5 percent or more of the reviews in our sample; some codes, though, appeared in more than one-quarter of the reviews in the sample. We have not included these frequencies in our discussion of the data, however. This choice stems from the fact that, because of the nature of the data, we cannot assume that the frequency of any given code directly reflects its relative importance to the client.

We have organized our findings into five broad categories: Communications, Demeanor, Business Model, Lawyering, and Tenacity.

## Communications

With respect to communications, reviewers most often commented on the lawyer's timeliness of responses to client outreach, provision of status updates, explanations of the case and assessments of potential courses of action, and general degree of accessibility.

### *Prompt Response*

As might be expected, one very important aspect of clients' interactions with their lawyers is the promptness of communications. Clients reported being grateful when their lawyers provide timely responses to their questions, and they expressed dissatisfaction when the lawyer fails to provide timely responses. On the positive end of the spectrum, one client stated, "I am sure he had other clients, but I will say it felt like I was the only one, because he would get back to me quickly when I had questions." Another said, "I was always able to call with questions and was never made to wait or feel like I was inconveniencing anyone." Prompt responses seem to give clients the feeling that their case matters to their lawyer.

"I am sure he had other clients, but I will say it felt like I was the only one, because he would get back to me quickly when I had questions."

Clients were pleased, and sometimes surprised, when the lawyer responded to queries outside of normal business hours or on holidays. As one reviewer stated, "I was looking for a lawyer on New Year's Day and sent a couple emails to lawyers asking for a consultation. [This lawyer] called me within a couple hours, even though he was on vacation and it was New Year's Day." Another client said, "I emailed her through her website on a holiday evening and she called me back within the hour!" Another noted, "Most of the time, all my questions were answered within MINUTES." Yet another commented that the lawyer, "called me back within minutes of my call and eased my stress and anxiety I had from being in this difficult situation."

Though not an overarching theme in reviews, a handful of clients mentioned that they went with a smaller law firm over a larger firm because of a perception that lawyers in smaller firms are more attentive to their clients. For instance, one reviewer reflected, "I selected a small firm instead of a large firm because I felt I would get better attention. I was totally right! [My lawyer] stayed on top of my case and always answered my emails in less than 15 minutes on most occasions."

While most reviewers had positive things to say about the lawyer's responsiveness, this is an area where we also saw a relatively large number of negative reviews. One client expressed frustration that the lawyer, "rarely returned phone calls, would not take appointments to discuss [the] case, [and] only met minutes before a hearing." Another reviewer offered some constructive criticism: "[This lawyer] would benefit from better organization and improved communication skills. While she intends to follow up . . . she lacks consistency. She provides what appear to be valid excuses for her poor response time [and] poor communication, but after 2-3 times, well, it just gets old."

Some clients felt that their lawyer stopped responding once they had been retained. One reviewer stated, “Once I paid him the \$2500, he would not return phone calls, give me updates on my case, or file the necessary paperwork on time.” Another client reflected that, “At first he was very responsive and communication was great. However, once he thought he had me as a client, communication dropped off significantly, appointments weren’t kept, and calls not returned at all, or at least not in a timely manner.”

## *Status Updates*

Another important aspect of clients’ interactions with their lawyers is providing status updates about the case. One client stated that the lawyer “always kept me informed and up to date on all issues involving the case, made sure we understood all the proceedings, and got us the best possible outcome.” Another client appreciated honesty in updates: “Throughout the process, [my lawyers] kept me abreast of my situation, took time to meet with me frequently, and truthfully informed me of developments, even if they were not in my favor.”

Many clients noted that being kept informed about the status of the case helped them feel at ease. As one reviewer articulated, the lawyer “made a very hard situation so much better by keeping me informed and giving me the advice I needed.” Another said, “I was kept current with everything of substance with my case and never felt like I needed to worry about it.”

Clients seem to appreciate unprompted status updates. As one client put it, “I never had to inquire about the status of my case because I was always updated with any new developments regarding my legal matter.” Another client stated, “I never had to call him once to ask what was going on because he always stayed in touch with me and kept me updated.” Yet another shared that the lawyer “kept me informed without me having to call constantly for an update.”

Clients were discontent when they felt they were not appropriately kept in the loop about the status of their case. One client said the lawyer “was non-communicative about important aspects of my case. I had to literally pursue him to get the answers I needed . . . .” Another reviewer stated that the lawyer “ruined our case by not keeping us posted on any relevant advice or case details until it was [too] late to do anything about it.” Another client felt that the lawyer engaged in purposeful delaying of the process: “He did not keep me reasonably informed and continued to withhold information from me, refusing to give me copies [of documents] and continuing to engage in delay tactics.”

## *Explaining the Case to the Client and Assessing Courses of Action*

With so much of the legal process being esoteric and fairly convoluted, it is not surprising that a number of the reviews in our sample included some reflection about the lawyer explaining the case and the process to the client. One satisfied client stated that the lawyer “explained the entire bankruptcy process, what to expect, and how it was going to affect us.” Another said that the lawyer “made sure I knew exactly what was going on and was completely informed of my choices.”

Many clients were grateful for a lawyer who was willing to take time to fully answer their questions. For instance, one client said that the lawyer “answered all my questions and took his time to explain all my rights.” Another stated that the lawyer “took the time to explain all the details and answered all my questions throughout the process.” Yet another reflected: “If I have any legal questions or am confused, I know that with an email or a phone call he will promptly get back to me and help me understand things.”

There were also many clients who appreciated honest, realistic explanations from their lawyers. As one client put it, “[My lawyer] explained everything to me . . . . He did not sugarcoat anything, but level-set my expectations about what was ahead.”

“[My lawyer] made a very hard situation so much better by keeping me informed and giving me the advice I needed”

“[My lawyer] explained everything to me . . . . He did not sugarcoat anything, but level-set my expectations about what was ahead.”

“[My lawyer] described exactly what would happen and how it would happen and always, I repeat always, made sure I understood what was going on and made sure I was involved in all the decisions.”

Similarly, another client said, “[My lawyer] does not sugarcoat your problems and will tell you straight up what to expect, the outcome he is trying to achieve, and, finally, what could take place.” Another client explained: “He’s not cheap and for good reason; the man gives you a realistic evaluation of your current situation and an estimation of what the expected outcome is, along with a worst case scenario.”

In addition, a considerable proportion of clients were grateful for being kept informed about or involved in the case strategy. For instance, one client said, “[My lawyer] was very organized and made sure I was fully informed on the strategic plan and what I needed to do to be prepared . . . I really felt like I was involved in my case and had a say in the strategic plan.” Another stated that the lawyer “described exactly what would happen and how it would happen and always, I repeat always, made sure I understood what was going on and made sure I was involved in all the decisions.”

Several reviewers placed value on the lawyer distilling complicated processes and legal jargon into more understandable terms. As one client explained, “My only issue was that I was not very familiar with the process/jargon, so at times wasn’t sure where I stood or what happened next. However, when I reached out to [my lawyer] with my questions/concerns, he took the time to walk me through them.” Another client said that the lawyer “explained my situation in legal terms and then in more human/real-world terms.”

A number of clients valued their lawyer assessing and explaining possible courses of action and guiding them toward a path that would produce the best outcome. One client in the criminal context shared that, “As a former prosecutor, [my lawyer] understood the inner workings of the justice system and was able to help me understand my realities—what was possible, what was likely, and what was unlikely.” A client with a personal injury case said the lawyer “offered many different viewpoints on how we could go about the case and settling.” As another client with a family case put it, the lawyer “would assess all the facts and tell me honestly what my chances were in accomplishing my goals and point out alternative outcomes that may have been more realistic if my primary objectives were out of reach.”

## *Accessibility*

Similar to providing prompt responses and status updates on the case, clients appreciate when the lawyer is accessible and available when needed. As one client put it, “Her office door is always open and, as busy as she is, she never seems too busy to meet with me or address my concerns.” Another said the lawyer was “just a phone call away and ready to answer my questions, explain a process, or clarify something on the paperwork.” Yet another said the lawyer “let me know up front that she was not an ‘8 to 5’ worker, that I could contact her at any time because she knew what I was going through and was going to help me.”

Some clients were not so satisfied with the lawyer’s accessibility. One expressed frustration in saying, “I asked to speak with the attorney several times before the hearing took place, but according to [the lawyer] because she handles so many cases, she does not have time to speak with everyone.” Another shared that the lawyer “will not return any phone calls” and “booked an appointment with me to discuss the details and he didn’t even show up.”

“Her office door is always open and, as busy as she is, she never seems too busy to meet with me or address my concerns.”



# Demeanor

Reviewers very often commented on characteristics of the lawyer related to their interpersonal behaviors. Specifically, clients were satisfied when their lawyer demonstrated qualities associated with integrity and trustworthiness; professionalism; tolerance, sensitivity, and compassion; sociability; taking a personal interest in the case; and courtesy and respect.

## *Integrity and Trustworthiness*

Among the most frequently mentioned attributes, integrity and trustworthiness appear to be of considerable importance from the client's perspective. Reviewers often used other synonymic descriptors—such as honest, straightforward, ethical, and reliable—but the message is clear: clients want to feel confident that their lawyers conduct themselves in a manner that warrants trust.

Most often, clients reflecting on this attribute simply stated that the lawyer was trustworthy or mentioned trustworthiness in a list of other desirable qualities. One client said, “[This lawyer] is a kind, sincere person, with great integrity, a good sense of humor and perspective, concerned about his clients and their best interests.” Another stated that, “[This lawyer] epitomizes what a Georgia trial lawyer should be: trustworthy, patient, knowledgeable, confident, empathetic, assertive, and ethical.” Yet another reported the lawyer to be “honest, trustworthy, knowledgeable, strong in character, and caring.”

Some reviewers expressed the perception that integrity in a lawyer is the exception, rather than the rule. As one client articulated it, “In a profession where many clients are unsure of their attorney's integrity, [this lawyer] stands out as a professional who has a passion for putting his clients first and serving them to the absolute best of his ability.” Another client felt that their lawyer was “one of the few honest attorneys out there.” Another reviewer stated, “Usually the word attorney and the word honest are not interchangeable, but this is the one attorney that has changed that. He is honest, real, and a type of attorney that you can really trust.”

## *Professionalism*

A large proportion of reviews in our sample mentioned the lawyer's professionalism. Generally, clients did not elaborate much on specific behaviors that gave them the sense that the lawyer demonstrated professionalism. Rather, most clients simply stated that the lawyer was professional, very often as part of a list of other positive attributes. One client said the lawyer “is the perfect blend of knowledge with professionalism and compassion.” Another noted that the lawyer's “professionalism, expertise, care, and experience assured that my case would not get lost in the shuffle . . .” Yet another expressed gratitude in saying the lawyer's “level of professionalism and vast knowledge have been impeccable, imperative, and more than appreciated.”

## *Tolerance, Sensitivity, and Compassion*

Often, the reviews in our sample contained information about the lawyer's ability to relate to the client on a human level. In describing these qualities, clients often specifically used the terms tolerance, sensitivity, and compassion, but they also used words such as kind, caring, and empathetic. Further, these attributes were often listed in tandem with other skills and competencies, such as professionalism and knowledgeability.

“[This lawyer] is a kind, sincere person, with great integrity, a good sense of humor and perspective, concerned about his clients and their best interests.”

“[My lawyer] was truly kind, genuinely invested in her cases, and possesses a rare capacity for understanding and empathizing with her clients in their time of crisis”

“He put me at ease and made me laugh. He is extremely funny and a great personality that lightens what is a very stressful and emotional time for a parent dealing with a custody case.”

One client reflected that the lawyer was “truly kind, genuinely invested in her cases, and possesses a rare capacity for understanding and empathizing with her clients in their time of crisis.” Another reviewer stated that the lawyer “is the perfect blend of knowledge with professionalism and compassion.” Another client noted, “[My lawyer] represented me in a very knowledgeable, caring, supportive, practical, and professional manner.” In the criminal defense context, one client shared that “[this lawyer] has a good heart, he really cares about people and understands how we are only human and do encounter unfortunate circumstances.” A client with a bankruptcy case said, “I was very nervous about filing for bankruptcy . . . and nervous that I would be shamed or made to feel bad about my situation, but that isn’t what happened at all. [My lawyer] really has compassion and didn’t ever make me feel like I should be embarrassed or ashamed at all.”

### *Sociability*

Clients also appreciate some degree of sociability in their lawyers, along with professional and legal skills. One client stated, “[My lawyer] was professional, but cool and casual and friendly.” Another said, “Beyond the legal, business, and accounting expertise, [my lawyer] is funny, easy-going, diplomatic, and down-to-earth.” One client shared how the lawyer’s sociability eased stress: “He put me at ease and made me laugh. He is extremely funny and a great personality that lightens what is a very stressful and emotional time for a parent dealing with a custody case.” There were very few negative comments related to sociability, but most of them contained the term *rude*.

### *Taking a Personal Interest in the Case*

Some clients described the lawyer taking measures to assure the client that the case matters and that the client is a priority to them. As one client articulated it, “At no time did I feel like I was on an assembly line, given a number, and impersonally rushed through anything.” Another said that the lawyer “treated me as a person, not just a client.” Yet another went into some detail saying, “In addition to the facts and the law, he was interested in my personal story. Who I was and what I was trying to accomplish in that courtroom. Not all attorneys try to build a personal relationship with their clients. It can be very important, however. That relationship is a connection that informs all other decisions. I believed that our relationship helped us immensely toward achieving my legal objectives.”

Conversely, a handful of displeased clients felt that the lawyer did not exhibit these qualities. One client noted, “I felt as if I was just another dollar sign to her and the firm.” Another said the lawyer “was extremely dry and unconcerned about the case.”

“While on the phone or during an actual face-to-face meeting, I found [my lawyer] to treat me with great respect and help me get my dignity back after being in the most embarrassing situation in my life.”

### *Courtesy and Respect*

Clients also value lawyers treating them with courtesy and respect. For the most part, clients simply state that the lawyer was courteous and respectful, often in a list with other skills and qualities. For instance, one client said that the lawyer “handled the case in a very professional, courteous, and efficient manner.” A client with a criminal case said, “While on the phone or during an actual face-to-face meeting, I found [my lawyer] to treat me with great respect and help me get my dignity back after being in the most embarrassing situation in my life.” Another reflected, “I learned from [my lawyer] that a great lawyer is not just one who always does his or her job, but also is the one who knows how to respect his or her clients.”

“At no time did I feel like I was on an assembly line, given a number, and impersonally rushed through anything.”



# Business Model

Another broad area of client concern encompasses issues related to the value of the lawyer's contribution to the matter, ability to achieve specific outcomes, and cost of services.

## *Impacting Value to Clients*

Of course, clients care about getting valuable services from their lawyers—they want bang for their buck. Most commonly, these comments were broad statements about the lawyer impacting value to the client. For example, one client in the business context simply noted that the lawyer's "work has contributed significantly to the success of our business." As another client in the business context put it, "I think we all want value that's commensurate with the fees we pay, but [my lawyer has] been able to exceed that hurdle and actually added value to the growth of our business through his experience and insights." Another was glad not to have handled the process *pro se*: "At first I wondered if it was something that I would have been able to handle on my own, but I quickly became very thankful that [my lawyer] stepped in . . . I'm afraid that, without her help, I would have filed [the forms] incorrectly, which I can only assume would have led to a long, drawn-out, and possibly very expensive hassle."

Many reviewers felt that their lawyers impact value by exceeding expectations. One client expressed that the lawyer "went above and beyond my expectations, very friendly, informative, and got the job done at an excellent/affordable cost." Another said, "[My lawyer] cares about my case and she is willing to take an extra step to find resources/information for me . . ." Yet another client explained that the lawyer "deeply cares for his clients and goes over and beyond to ensure the very best for them."

Those who were dissatisfied with the way the lawyer impacted value expressed considerable frustration. One client shared, "I had to hire a new lawyer that accomplished in one court session what [my previous lawyer] claimed he could not legally do in over three months of court sessions (after he billed me to death)." Another said, "I paid [my lawyer] to represent me on a criminal matter. He put zero effort into my case and took a lot of money. He never shows up to court or asks any questions."

A few clients expressed that hiring an ineffective lawyer exacerbates an already difficult situation. As one client articulated it, "Divorce is hard enough, but having an attorney who exploits your trust, the little money you have, and negatively affects your life makes the process even more traumatizing and damaging." Another client shared a similar sentiment: "I paid him in full and two months later my case has not been filed and my calls are never returned. . . . This firm has only brought a substantial amount of stress and even made my financial situation worse, now I'm facing foreclosure and my bank accounts are being garnished by the bank, yet they have not done anything to even file my case despite being paid."

## *Case Outcome*

It is not at all surprising that the case outcome is of utmost importance to clients. Many clients reported being satisfied that the lawyer facilitated a speedy resolution to the case. One client said, "I had a sensitive matter which was resolved quickly and efficiently." In the immigration context, one client stated, "I thought that this case would take a long period of time, but [my lawyer] did everything possible to shorten the process. Instead of the expected 1-2 years, it took only about 10 months and the results were positive." Another client reported that the lawyer "took on a sticky matter that could easily have become a public mess for all parties, and resolved it quickly, quietly, and to mutual satisfaction."

"I think we all want value that's commensurate with the fees we pay, but [my lawyer has] been able to exceed that hurdle and actually added value to the growth of our business through his experience and insights."

"[My lawyer] did an outstanding job on my case and got me the best possible outcome for my situation"

Many reviewers also shared that the lawyer helped to achieve the best possible outcome, given the circumstances. As one reviewer put it, the lawyer “did an outstanding job on my case and got me the best possible outcome for my situation, getting my case reduced from a felony charge down to a misdemeanor, which allowed me to keep my career.” A client in the personal injury case was pleased that “a successful settlement was reached, which was amazing given how difficult the opposing insurance company was being. . . . I don’t think I could have asked for a better outcome considering the circumstances.”

Additionally, many clients were glad that the lawyer helped get the case to resolution without the need to appear in court. One said, “Without ever going to court, [my lawyer] not only negotiated a settlement with the defendant, but negotiated the payback settlement with my health insurance company and the health providers expecting the bills to be paid by me.” Another shared that, “We never had to go to court and could not have been happier with the outcome. Actually, all parties in the matter walked away happy. That’s no easy feat.”

## *Cost*

The cost of retaining the lawyer was another common theme in our sample. Many of these reviews simply state that the client felt the price was fair, reasonable, or affordable. As one client put it, “Overall, the service I received was excellent and well worth the money spent to complete the process.” However, some reviewers were more specific about what made them satisfied or dissatisfied with the cost of hiring the lawyer.

Some clients noted appreciating the lawyer being flexible with fees or working on an alternative fee schedule. One client said that the lawyer “took my case on a contingency fee, very generous of him, since he has worked on my case for over six months now and has not been paid.” Another shared, “I ran out of money more than once, and he was so understanding and gracious. Even when I couldn’t immediately pay him, he never changed how hard he worked for me or treated me like a second-rate client.”

A considerable proportion of those commenting on cost were grateful for the lawyer’s transparent billing practices. As one client put it, “Unlike some attorneys who slip some charges unnoticed into your invoice, the [law firm] is very transparent in their dealings and you can negotiate an agreed-upon bulk amount for your entire case.” Another said, “All fees are presented and explained up front before you pay a dime.” Yet another felt that the “bills were never a surprise.”

Other clients felt that the lawyer charged a competitive rate compared with other lawyers. One reviewer stated that the lawyer “charges fairly for her services; my prior lawyer wanted a \$5000 retainer after already taking \$750 for which he did nothing.” Another noted that the lawyer had “very affordable pricing (less than half what I had been quoted elsewhere!).”

“I ran out of money more than once, and he was so understanding and gracious. Even when I couldn’t immediately pay him, he never changed how hard he worked for me or treated me like a second-rate client.”

Of course, not all clients were pleased with the cost or billing practices of the lawyer. One dissatisfied client said, “She talks a good game, but she’s only in it for the money. She charged eight times the national average for a divorce, then sat on \$12000 for a month without filing the first motion.” Another stated that the lawyer “charged for items where it was explicitly stated by himself that there would be no charge.” Another shared that the lawyer did not send notification that the retainer had been surpassed: “You will find out come billing time you are far beyond your retainer; you have racked up a hefty sum and now you pay or else.”

# Lawyering

Of course, reviewers very often expressed their views about the attorney's performance as specifically related to the practice of law. Specifically, clients reflected on legal knowledge and expertise; ability to negotiate and advocate for the client; quality of legal advice; loyalty and dedication to the client; and in-court trial advocacy.

## *Knowledge of the Law and Expertise*

A common theme in the reviews related to clients' perceptions of their lawyer's knowledge of the law. Many of these comments were general statements about the lawyer being knowledgeable—and, very often, clients included statements about knowledgeability in a list of other positive qualities. For example, one reviewer said, “[This lawyer] offers the perfect blend of compassion, honesty, and knowledge of the law.” Another stated, “He is cheerful, kind, [and] knowledgeable.”

Though the bulk of the comments about knowledge of the law were general statements indicating the lawyer was knowledgeable, there were a handful of themes that emerged within this code. One such theme, and the most prevalent, related to lawyers' knowledge based on experience or knowledge coupled with experience. As one reviewer noted, “[My lawyer's] vast experience and knowledge came through as he mapped out a plan and told me step-by-step what was expected of me during the entire process.” Another reviewer commented that the lawyer, “demonstrated not only an incredible amount of knowledge, but also practical experience.”

Though much less common, a few clients noted that the lawyer's knowledge was current or up-to-date. One client stated that the lawyer “is a truly knowledgeable attorney with an excellent grasp of current case law and litigation protocol.” Also, a few clients reflected about their lawyer's knowledge in specific legal areas. For example, one reviewer noted that the lawyer “has a lot of knowledge in her specific areas—most notably within Intellectual Property, more specifically Trademarks. She has great insight in Association Law and all other aspects of Business and Real Estate law.”

Other reviewers framed their comments in terms of expertise, either general or in one or more specific areas. One client noted that the lawyer's “obvious expertise gave me great confidence that everything was going to transpire smoothly, which it did.” Another shared that the lawyer had “an outstanding grasp and understanding of educational law.” Yet another stated that, “[my lawyer] had come from the banking industry and has a unique perspective on how the financial world operates.”

Many reviewers were grateful that their lawyers had expertise in multiple areas of the law. For instance, one client in the environmental law context said the lawyer's “expertise with the Natural Gas Act, NEPA, APA, and the Commission Policy Statement have been crucial in our fight. Additionally, her expertise with FOIA, Privileged, and CEII material regarding due process rights has also given us an edge . . .” In the business context, another client shared that the lawyer “has represented my business on several matters of real estate and business-related issues. His knowledge and expertise in these areas are evident every time we have had a need to consult with him.”

A few clients expressed appreciation when their attorneys were honest when an issue fell outside their realm of expertise. As one client shared, “What I really liked about [my lawyer] was that he did not hesitate to tell me when he was out of his area of expertise and offered a more cost-effective solution to my inquiry.” Another client said that the lawyer “has his areas of expertise and he has his gray areas and he has his areas where he will say, ‘Sorry, I can't help you because I don't know anything about it.’”

“[My lawyer's] vast experience and knowledge came through as he mapped out a plan and told me step-by-step what was expected of me during the entire process.”

## *Negotiating and Advocating*

Another common theme in the reviews related to the lawyer negotiating on behalf of the client or being an advocate for the client. Most who identified negotiating as an attribute expressed appreciation that the lawyer's skills helped to avoid a lengthy, expensive court process or was able to reach an acceptable agreement with the opposing party. For instance, one client who had a business case stated that the lawyer "successfully avoided what would otherwise be expensive litigation in favor of a more practical negotiated approach which, in each instance, solved my problem without 'leaving anything' on the negotiating table." Another client, this time in the family context, said, "His negotiating skills are 'second to none' as he was able to lead my mediation and allow my ex-wife and I to come to mutual agreements outside the formal court process."

"[My lawyer] successfully avoided what would otherwise be expensive litigation in favor of a more practical negotiated approach which, in each instance, solved my problem without 'leaving anything' on the negotiating table"

With respect to client advocacy, often the reviewer made only general statements about the lawyer looking out for the client's best interests. For instance, one client stated that the lawyer "was a strong, committed advocate on my behalf, able to successfully negotiate with my creditors." A client in the business context said, "Through working with her, I feel I truly have an advocate for the continued success of my business." A client with a family case reflected, "When I had my first telephone consultation, I knew that I chose someone that would be an advocate for what I felt was in the best interest for my family."

"Many clients went a step further and described the lawyer as a fighter, a bulldog, or someone that goes to bat for the client, among other similar descriptors. For instance, one client said the lawyer was a "very aggressive attorney who fought for my divorce rights. Wow – this man is dynamite!! He stood right up to the other attorney and wouldn't back down." Another reported that the lawyer "is ready to go to bat for our kids with special needs, and that can't be said for all the Special Education lawyers out there." Another client said the lawyer was "the bulldog I needed with the opposing counsel" and, similarly, yet another said the lawyer "was a pit bull for me."

Several clients reviewing lawyers in the family law context appreciated that the lawyer advocated for the children's best interests. For instance, one client said of the lawyer, "She is a strong advocate for both moms and dads, but her main focus is what's right for the child." Another said, "Not only was he superb, but insisted on ALWAYS holding my daughter's best interest even in front of my own."

On the negative end of the spectrum, clients expressed dissatisfaction and disappointment when they felt the lawyer failed to adequately advocate on their behalf. As one client put it, "He talks a good game, but when the time came for him to help me and advise me, he rolled over for the other side. Very disappointing. Not aggressive enough to get the job done." Another put it bluntly: "If you want a lawyer that has your best interests at heart and works hard for you, look elsewhere."

"[The lawyer's] recommendation [was] concrete and practical and she left no doubt what the best solution for her client should be"

## *Quality of Legal Advice*

A number of clients reflected on the quality of the lawyer's legal advice in their reviews. Most often, these comments were general statements about the advice, without going into detail about the advice or how it was helpful (or not). As one client said, "[My lawyer's] advice was well thought out and designed to protect my interest." Another stated that "This was an extremely emotional issue for us and [our lawyer] expertly guided us towards how to best protect our assets while moving to a quick and fair resolution . . ." Yet another said that the lawyer's "recommendation [was] concrete and practical and she left no doubt what the best solution for her client should be." In the negative, one reviewer noted that the lawyer, "gave incorrect legal advice and did more harm than good."

A handful of reviewers linked the advice they received to the cost of their case. One client stated that the lawyer “provided wise and cost-effective advice.” A dissatisfied client noted that the lawyer “was a severe disappointment, and he made several missteps in his recommendations which have forced me to pay additional fines and be forced to take extra measures . . .”

### *Loyalty and Dedication to the Client*

Clients frequently reflected on the lawyer’s degree of loyalty and dedication to the client. One client in the business context said, “I wish I could clone [this lawyer] for other cases outside of his area, because the personal attention and the dedication that he showed was outstanding.” A client in a criminal case was grateful that the lawyer prioritized the client’s interests: “She puts her clients FIRST! She takes her work very seriously and her top priority is to do her best to give her clients the justice and freedom that they deserve.” Another client said that the lawyer “took the case when no one else would and regardless of the outcome, we know [my lawyer] is doing his absolute best to resolve the divorce in a rational, logical, amicable way . . .”

### *In-Court Advocacy*

Frequently, reviewers made note of the lawyer’s ability and performance in the courtroom. One client in a business contract case was grateful: “Thanks again for the heavy work preparation for our case. It was evident we were adequately prepared to present the facts.” A client in a criminal case said, “I was very impressed at the actual trial. [My lawyer] represented me with true professionalism and was completely aware of both the laws of the state and my rights. He punched numerous holes in the statements of the officers testifying against me as well as the prosecutor.” Another criminal defense client said, “I was always impressed by his demeanor in the court. He was very attentive, concentrated, and alert and engaged during [the] trial process. He was very aggressive, yet respectful in the courtroom.” Yet another was impressed with how the lawyer articulated the case in court: “I was amazed how [my lawyer] took a very difficult case and presented it to the jury, and simplifying it to layman’s terms. Methodically time-lining the events and putting the pieces together, showing what was very confusing very clear[ly].”

Not all clients were pleased with the lawyer’s performance in court. One client said, “The other attorney swallowed him up and spit him out in front of the judge. He tries to be ‘cool’ in court but it was apparently a front for his lack of experience because he lost his cool and began nervously arguing with the judge.” Another dissatisfied client shared that the lawyer “showed up for court unprepared and could not remember important aspects of my case.” A client in a family case felt that the lawyer “completely crumbled while trying to litigate. The opposing party completely man-handled him. To say he was like a deer staring into headlights is an understatement.”

“I was amazed how [my lawyer] took a very difficult case and presented it to the jury, and simplifying it to layman’s terms”



# Tenacity

The final theme category relates to the lawyer's tenacity, particularly as related to the ability to see a case through from start to finish; diligence, conscientiousness, and attention to detail; and work ethic.

## *Seeing a Case Through from Start to Timely Finish*

"[This lawyer] took only three weeks to accomplish what my previous defense lawyer could not in six months, keeping me out of the work force and causing me daily stress."

Another factor contributing to client satisfaction is the lawyer's ability to see a case through, especially to a quick or efficient resolution. One client shared that the lawyer "quickly and gracefully solved my problem that was in deadlock for a long time." Another stated, "I received excellent service from the first time meeting with [my lawyer] at his office to the day he was able to get my case dismissed." Another client compared the lawyer's performance to a previously retained lawyer: "[This lawyer] took only three weeks to accomplish what my previous defense lawyer could not in six months, keeping me out of the work force and causing me daily stress."

Clients become frustrated when a lawyer fails to see a case through. For instance, one client said, "After seven months, at a critical point of activity, [my lawyer] did not want to answer questions relating to the case strategy (strengths and weaknesses). He quickly withdrew from the case and left me to start over with a new attorney." Another stated that the lawyer's "lack of follow-through and lack of providing a clear strategy and plan regarding my case verged on negligence." Yet another shared that "[i]t took almost a year and a half to get my case resolved and [the lawyer] and her staff were a major contributing factor in that. I had to call numerous times just to find out the status of my final divorce decree and the first three times I was misinformed by them."

Several clients reflected that their lawyers' efforts in seeing the case through impacted costs. As one reviewer put it, "She is straight-forward, very knowledgeable, and works hard to get the situation handled swiftly. She does not cut corners, but finds ways to keep things moving so no time is wasted (time is money)." Another client shared that the lawyer "is an honest man and helps you out as much as possible, he tries to save you money where he can and is determined to keep fighting until the job is done." On the negative side, one client stated that, "My case seemed to drag on forever, creating what seemed to be a way to charge more." Another said, "After three years' time and 80k spent, I am not one step closer to being divorced than I was when I first retained him."

## *Diligence, Conscientiousness, and Attention to Detail*

A number of reviews contained information related to the lawyer's diligence, conscientiousness, or attention to detail. For the most part, clients simply stated that the lawyer demonstrated one or more of these characteristics, often listed with other attributes, without providing additional detail.

"[Our lawyer] was very thorough and very detail-oriented, so we always felt like he covered all aspects of our case"

One client expressed gratitude saying, "I would like to thank [my lawyer] for his professional and meticulous work on my case, and praise how satisfied I am with his work." Another shared how the lawyer made the client feel: "[My lawyer] and his team's meticulous preparation enabled me to move forward with my suit with confidence and certainty." Another client said the lawyer "was very thorough and very detail-oriented, so we always felt like he covered all aspects of our case." Yet another noted that thoroughness

contributed to hiring the lawyer more than once: “We hired [this lawyer] again later because he was so expedient and thorough. We were very happy with his work and attentiveness on both occasions.”

A few clients were displeased with the lawyer’s performance as related to these qualities. In one notable example, the client stated that the lawyer “sued the wrong party” and “made two factual errors in his opening and closing statements in the trial.” Another client expressed frustration at having to repeat information: “She took horrible notes and I had to remind her numerous times what was said.”

## *Work Ethic*

A lawyer’s work ethic appears to be another contributing factor to the client’s satisfaction. One client praised the lawyer saying, “I am certain that no one could have tried harder nor accomplished more than she did.” Another said the lawyer’s “professional demeanor and work ethic set the standard for Washington lawyers.” Yet another said the lawyer “only wants the best for his clients and will go the extra mile to do his job at 110%.”

Several reviewers tied the lawyer’s work ethic to a favorable outcome. For instance, one noted that the lawyer “pursued the case tirelessly when I thought I had no chance of prevailing. We were successful thanks to his considerable efforts.” Another client said, “There is something about [my lawyer], he is dedicated and highly focused; in my opinion, he affects the outcome with pure determination and fighting spirit . . .”

## The Client Perspective Summarized

The portrait of the client perspective that our data paints is not terribly surprising and, in many ways, comports with the anecdotal prevailing wisdom. Still, with these results, we are able to begin to describe the lawyer that clients want and need in concrete terms.

Clients want lawyers who are effective communicators. Specifically, they want a lawyer who provides prompt responses to their inquiries and keeps them updated on the status of their case. Clients want a lawyer who will explain their case to them and help them to understand the various options they have—and which options are likely to result in successful outcomes. They want a lawyer who is available when the client needs them.

Clients want lawyers who exhibit certain behavioral attributes. They want the lawyers they hire to demonstrate integrity, honesty, and a sense of ethics. Clients want an attorney who presents themselves in a professional manner. Clients want to be treated with kindness and empathy, as well as courtesy and respect. They want a lawyer with whom they can have friendly interactions and who treats each case like it truly matters.

Clients want to feel that they are giving their business to the right lawyer. They want a lawyer who can produce the best possible outcome for their case. They want to feel that they are getting valuable services for the money they are investing—that the attorney has taken their case for more than just the money and consistently meets or exceeds their expectations. Clients want a lawyer who is honest and flexible when it comes to cost and billing.

Clients want an effective lawyer, one who demonstrates and applies thorough legal knowledge and expertise. They want a lawyer who competently advocates and negotiates on their behalf, as well as one who provides sound legal advice. They want their lawyer to show dedication to their cases and to put the client first. They want lawyers who can capably advocate for them in the courtroom.

Clients want a lawyer who will work persistently to achieve their goals. They want to hire a lawyer who sticks with them, who sees their case through. They want a lawyer who works diligently and gets the details right. They want a hardworking lawyer.

# TYING IN THE LAWYER PERSPECTIVE

## Legal Skills:

skills traditionally understood to be required for the specific discipline of law, such as preparing a case on appeal

In addition to the client perspective, a crucial (and related) consideration in bridging the gap between legal needs and legal service provision is the perspective of those providing legal services. By better understanding what legal practitioners say new lawyers need to be successful, along with where and how it overlaps with what clients want from their lawyers, we can ensure that lawyers are equipped with the necessary skills to perform well in their roles—which, in turn, further puts them in a position to serve their clients well. Gaining such an understanding of the practitioner perspective was precisely the purpose of IAALS' *Foundations for Practice* survey. We administered the survey in 37 states in late 2014 and, ultimately, received responses from more than 24,000 lawyers in all 50 states and from a broad cross-section of practice settings and areas of expertise.

In the survey, we presented 147 foundations, each of which fell into one of three categories: legal skills, professional competencies, and characteristics. We asked respondents to indicate, for their specific type of organization, specialty, or department, whether each foundation was:<sup>14</sup>

- “Necessary immediately for the new lawyer’s success in the short term” (where “new lawyer” was defined as “someone embarking on their first year of law-related work”);
- “Not necessary in the short term but must be acquired for the lawyer’s success over time”;
- “Not necessary at any point, but advantageous to the lawyer’s success”; or
- “Not relevant to success.”

The focus of our initial report on the *Foundations for Practice* project—*The Whole Lawyer and the Character Quotient*—was identifying what *new* lawyers need as they enter the profession; in other words, the foundations that respondents reported were necessary in the short term. Of the 147 foundations presented in the survey, respondents identified 77 that were necessary immediately out of law school.<sup>15</sup> We gave a name to new law graduates who possess all of these 77 Foundations for Practice: we called them the *whole lawyer*.

Our results demonstrated that practitioners placed a disproportionate emphasis on characteristics. Indeed, respondents indicated that three-quarters (75.6%) of the characteristics presented in the survey were necessary in the short term, compared with fewer than half of legal skills and professional competencies being identified as such (40.0% and 45.5%, respectively)—a statistically significant difference.<sup>16</sup> Of course, this does not suggest that legal skills and professional competencies are unimportant, only that these foundations can be acquired over the course of a lawyer’s career. Our findings demonstrated unequivocally that new lawyers “are not merely legal technicians, nor are they merely cognitive powerhouses . . . . New lawyers need some legal skills and require intelligence, but they are successful when they come to the job with a much broader blend of legal skills, professional competencies, and characteristics that comprise the *whole lawyer*.”<sup>17</sup> These results are in alignment with those of the *Think Like a Client* project: practicing lawyers and clients appear to agree that new lawyers need more than just legal skills to be successful.

## Professional Competencies:

skills seen as useful across vocations, such as managing meetings effectively

## Characteristics:

features or qualities, such as integrity and trustworthiness

14 *Hiring the Whole Lawyer*, *supra* note 10 (The portion asking respondents to evaluate the 147 foundations was the first of two substantive sections of the survey. The second substantive section asked respondents to identify the helpfulness of seventeen distinct hiring criteria (such as class rank, participation in a law school clinic, and court clerkships) in determining whether a candidate for employment possesses the foundations identified as necessary in the short term.)

15 *The Whole Lawyer and the Character Quotient*, *supra* note 10 (A foundation was considered necessary in the short term if at least half of respondents indicated it as such).

16 *Id.* ( $X^2(2) = 13.17, p = 0.001$ ).

17 *Id.* at 5.



In the years since we administered the *Foundations for Practice* survey, we have used the findings to develop tools for law schools to use in designing curricula and for legal employers to use in hiring. We started by grouping the 77 Foundations for Practice into five categories—Lawyer as Practitioner, Lawyer as Professional, Lawyer as Problem-Solver, Lawyer as Communicator, and Lawyer as Self-Starter. These categories comprised the basis for development of learning outcomes for implementation in law schools. We then conducted workshops around the country with four law schools and 36 legal employers to refine the learning outcomes and develop hiring tools for employers—the goal being to align both legal education and legal hiring practices with what practitioners reported new lawyers need. Our next step in the *Foundations for Practice* project will be to explore avenues for implementation of these tools both in law schools and in legal hiring.

This study augments that work with a much-needed perspective: that of the person ultimately being served by the lawyer.

## CONCLUSION

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Clients are, of course, satisfied when their lawyers are knowledgeable about the law, advocate effectively on their behalf, and bring about desired case outcomes. But clients value more than just legal acumen. They want a lawyer who communicates effectively, understands how clients want to be treated, and behaves ethically and professionally. This study takes the *Foundations for Practice* findings one step further, suggesting that this blend of attributes and abilities is important not just for new lawyers, but throughout the lawyer's career—and it is not just what other lawyers expect. Much more importantly, it is what clients expect.

Law schools teach their students to think like lawyers, and rightly so. We propose, though, that there is more to success in the legal field: lawyers also need to think like a client.

Learning outcomes are the bedrock of standards-based instruction. They clarify what students are expected to master by describing the knowledge students must acquire by the end of an assignment, course, or program.

# APPENDIX

*Table 1: Practice Area Breakdown*

PRACTICE AREA	NARROWED DATA SET <sup>18</sup>		SAMPLE	
	N	%	n	%
Criminal Defense	61135	24.1%	458	20.5%
Family	60526	23.8%	452	20.3%
Personal Injury	21494	8.5%	160	7.2%
Business	18430	7.3%	138	6.2%
Bankruptcy & Debt	18033	7.1%	134	6.0%
Immigration	17312	6.8%	130	5.8%
Real Estate	15971	6.3%	120	5.4%
Employment & Labor	12677	5.0%	94	4.2%
Estate Planning	12466	4.9%	94	4.2%
Lawsuits & Disputes	6836	2.7%	52	2.3%
Government	2207	0.9%	40	1.8%
Consumer Protection	1645	0.6%	40	1.8%
Intellectual Property	1425	0.6%	40	1.8%
Civil Rights	1186	0.5%	40	1.8%
General Practice	1176	0.5%	40	1.8%
Education	553	0.2%	40	1.8%
Ethics & Professional Responsibility	338	0.1%	40	1.8%
Animal Law	202	0.1%	40	1.8%
Environmental and Natural Resources	135	0.1%	40	1.8%
International Law	123	0.0%	40	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>253870</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2232</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<sup>18</sup> The revised data set includes only reviews that included at least 10 characters and were posted by registered users. Proxy reviews were identified and replaced during the coding process.

**Table 2: Data Codes**

ORIGINAL FOUNDATIONS CATEGORY	CODE
<b>Business Development and Relations</b>	General business development and relations
	Cultivating networks
	Marketing
<b>Communications</b>	General communications
	Customize communications
	Fluent in other language
	Listening ability
	Promptly respond
	Speaking ability
	Status updates
	Virtual communication
	Writing ability
<b>Emotional and Interpersonal Intelligence</b>	General emotional and interpersonal intelligence
	Appearance and behavior
	Courtesy and respect
	Reading others
	Self-control
	Tact and diplomacy
	Tolerance, sensitivity, compassion
<b>Involvement and Community Service</b>	General Involvement and Community Service
	Pro bono work
	Volunteering or taking influential positions
<b>Legal Thinking and Application</b>	Assessing courses of action
	Evaluating arguments
	Framing a case compellingly
	Gathering facts
	Identifying facts, issues, and discrepancies
	Knowledge of substantive and procedural law
	Legal reasoning and argument
	Negotiating and advocating
	Researching the Law
Thinking strategically	

*Table 2: Data Codes, cont'd*

ORIGINAL FOUNDATIONS CATEGORY	CODE
<b>Litigation Practice</b>	General litigation practice
	Arbitration
	Demand letters
	Depositions
	In-court appellate advocacy
	In-court trial advocacy
	Interviewing
	Mediation
	Pleadings, motions, and briefs
	Preparing for appeal
	Preparing for trial
	Requesting or Producing discovery
<b>Passion and Ambition</b>	General passion and ambition
	Commitment to justice
	Overcoming challenges
	Passion for work
	Show initiative
	Work ethic
<b>Professional Development</b>	Authoring and presenting
	Commitment to excellence
	Expertise in a particular area
	Seeking advice in problem-solving
	Seeking and responsiveness to feedback
	Seeking work to expand skills
	Self-awareness
	Taking responsibility
<b>Professionalism</b>	General professionalism
	Conclude client relationships
	Confidentiality
	Documentation and organization
	Honoring commitments
	Loyalty and dedication to client
	Professional boundaries
	Punctuality
	Quality of legal advice
	Timekeeping and billing practices

**Table 2: Data Codes, cont'd**

ORIGINAL FOUNDATIONS CATEGORY	CODE
<b>Qualities and Traits</b>	Assertiveness
	Attention to detail
	Big-picture thinking
	Common sense
	Confidence
	Conscientiousness
	Creativity
	Decisiveness
	Diligence
	Energy
	Grit
	Humility
	Integrity and trustworthiness
	Intellectual Curiosity
	Intelligence
	Maturity
	Patience
	Perceptiveness
	Persuasiveness
	Positivity
Prudence	
Resourcefulness	
Sociability	
Strong moral compass	
<b>Stress and Crisis Management</b>	Calm in critical situations
	Flexibility and adaptability
	Resilience after setback
<b>Technology and Innovation</b>	General technology and innovation
	Leveraging technology in cases
	Online presence
<b>Transaction Practice</b>	Assessing a deal
	Business formation services
	Contract negotiation
	Drafting contracts and agreement
	Drafting policies
	Knowledge of business and industry
	Timeliness of completing a deal

**Table 2: Data Codes, cont'd**

ORIGINAL FOUNDATIONS CATEGORY	CODE
<b>Working with Others</b>	General working with others
	Expressing disagreement
	Impacting value to clients
	Recognizing client needs
	Working as a team
<b>Workload Management</b>	General workload management
	Anticipating case needs
	Delegating to staff
	Managing meetings
	Managing multiple tasks
	Quality of work
	Seeing a case through
<b>Non-Foundation Codes</b>	Client advocacy
	Accessibility
	Explaining case to client
	Cost
	Outcome
	Took a personal interest in the case
	Unbundling

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