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# The First Three Habits of Highly Effective Clients



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In the law, the attorney-client relationship is crucial to achieving the best possible outcome. I have already written about some of the qualities of a good lawyer. And in my last column, I outlined the seven habits of highly effective clients. In this column, I examine how the first three habits help clients effectively navigate their legal dispute, and the legal system.

## 1. Telling the Truth

“It’s amazing how lies grow. You start with a small one that seems easy to cover, then you get boxed in and tell another one. Then another. People believe you at first, then they act upon your lies, and you catch yourself wishing you’d simply told the truth.” —John Grisham, *The Client*

One of the essential habits of successful clients is honesty. The truth lies at the heart of building trust between the client and the lawyer. The legal process is fact-driven, and the lawyer’s job is to tell the best true version of their client’s story. But a lawyer can’t tell a true story if it is based on half-truths, lies, or omissions. So the dishonest client is shooting himself in the foot.

*Practical advice:* Be upfront with your attorney, even if certain details seem damaging to your case. A lawyer can only protect you from what they know, so withholding information limits their ability to defend you.

## 2. Living in Reality

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” —Albert Einstein

The second habit focuses on attaining (and maintaining) objectivity. Legal matters are often stressful and emotionally charged, which can cloud judgment. Effective clients understand the importance of being realistic about their case. They listen to their attorney’s advice, recognize the limitations of the legal system, and prepare for challenges along the way. Living in reality means accepting that the journey to resolution may not always align with personal expectations.

*Practical advice:* Approach your case with a mindset of flexibility. In a lawsuit, for instance, you’ll be hoping for swift justice, but litigation can be slow and unpredictable. Listen to your attorney’s advice on potential delays, and be open to adapting your strategy if new evidence or complications arise (and they almost always do). This balanced mindset will help you and your attorney make better decisions throughout the process.

## 3. Being Realistic About Outcomes

“Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.” —Zig Ziglar

Highly effective clients are realistic. This means they understand the unpredictability of legal outcomes. The legal system is designed to deliver justice, but this justice is often “rough.” Many factors, from



court interpretations to new evidence, can influence the outcome of a case. Effective clients accept that they may not get the perfect resolution they envisioned and prepare themselves accordingly.

*Practical advice:* Discuss potential scenarios with your attorney early. Rather than expecting a guaranteed win, plan for a range of results. Cases are unpredictable, and judges may make decisions that seem flawed and unjust. By preparing mentally and emotionally for different outcomes, you can approach the result—favorable or not—with greater composure.

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