

The Extra Mile

Establishing and maintaining a relationship based on understanding a client's needs keeps Grope Hamilton Lawyers at the head of the boutique commercial law firm pack in Adelaide.

In the race to out-do each other on client service, Grope Hamilton Lawyers' Managing Partner, Mark Hamilton, fears that law firms may be forgetting to nurture what clients crave most - technical excellence.

In response to earlier feedback suggesting that clients were after more than just "the answer" to a legal problem, law firms have been striving to improve the client experience, and have initiated programs to instil into practice staff that is, such as empathy, listening and responsiveness.

Hamilton says clients appreciate technical excellence from their lawyers like never before. "There's a feeling around that technical excellence is a given, but I am not so sure it is. Clients with complex problems don't see it as such", Hamilton says.

Clients of Grope Hamilton Lawyers say that the firm has engendered a culture of technical excellence while still going to lengths to measure and improve service. Hamilton says that the increasing sophistication of his firm's client base has necessitated this focus on excellence.

"These days, you've got clients who know the profession well, and understand the strengths and weaknesses of different firms and use this to select firms for particular jobs", Hamilton says. "We regularly get clients using us for one type of legal matter, but going elsewhere for others. The days of having all of a client's work are dying; if not entirely dead".

Hamilton says that one part of this is that the firm, whilst offering a broad range of commercial legal services, including coverage of the main areas of business and commercial law, the firm does not offer a comprehensive range of commercial legal services.

"For this reason, we are looking to add experienced partners in such areas as taxation law, mining and resources and, possibly, family law with an accent on property settlement matters".

"Too often, law firms focus on completing the task at hand and lose sight of the big picture – the role of that task in the context of how it fits in with the client's business and the relationship between the client and advisor in the long term", Hamilton adds.

“When I started practise over 30 years ago, people felt about lawyers exclusively in terms of providing a specific legal service as and when required. They would come to a lawyer and say, I need this or that document prepared without engaging the lawyer in the transactional process as an advisor. Increasingly clients see commercial lawyers like they have come to see their external accountants; as part of an ongoing involved relationship”.

Hamilton says that savvy clients clearly appreciate that the value of service is a function of a long term advisory relationship and appreciate that involved relationships with lawyers build an understanding of the client’s business, leading to a higher level of commercially sound advice relevant to the business.

“Good commercial lawyers have high level critical reasoning ability and consequently excellent problem solving skills, which clients can turn to their advantage given some knowledge and insight of their lawyer with their industry and business”.

Hamilton says that it is easy for firms to pay lip service to the concept of quality, but the key is to ensure consistency and continuity, from the initial scope and discussion with a client through to the delivery of advice.

Hamilton, who has a Masters of Law degree in commercial law, says that there is no substitute as a lawyer for knowing the law. “You can’t fake that. A commercial lawyer without a good knowledge of law is but a commercial hack”, Hamilton says.

“Instilling an everything is urgent mantra; recruiting staff with the correct critical reasoning capacity and “can do” attitude are fundamental, along with the relevant office procedures, coaching and provision of appropriate resources to enable timely service delivery”.

“Close, long-standing professional relationships, excellent outcomes, lawyers and partners who are prepared to go the extra mile are what he strives for as managing partner. A reputation for advice that is prompt, sensible, considered and appropriate is the reward we seek”.

“A reputation for achieving tactical advantage in commercial disputes or legal tasks involving problem solving is what we strive for. This is the real benchmark that separates the good and very good lawyers”, Hamilton says.

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