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## **Corporate Legal Departments Feel Success after Conducting Client Feedback Program**

The legal department of a Fortune 500 company was reviewing their legal operations practices and interactions with their internal clients. Under the leadership of their Senior Vice President and General Counsel, the legal department of 25 attorneys decided to ask their internal clients at the company how their services were being viewed and what could be done to improve upon them.

During the first quarter that year, thirty Company executives and high-level managers were interviewed regarding their opinions on the services delivered to them by the legal department. The majority of interviews were held in-person in Chicago at corporate headquarters. Several of the interviews were conducted telephonically throughout February and March.

The participants filled out a fourteen-question short answer continuum-based questionnaire. This information was transferred into graphs which allowed the attorneys to visually see their service strengths and weaknesses at a glance. The in-person feedback reports combined with the statistical data provided a deeper level of knowledge.

The over-all feedback was quite positive. The interview process yielded specific areas in which the services were perceived as very strong. The results also highlighted areas that needed improvement or increased communication.

### **Overview Comments**

Over 90% of the respondents offered complimentary comments such as, “The legal department...

- provides strong business advice with pragmatism.”
- is very proactive.”
- is hard working.”
- is very responsive.”
- adds great value.”
- provides exceptional levels of service.”
- is comprised of well-respected attorneys.”

Almost to the individual, respondents reported that the attorneys in the department were caring, friendly, and concerned. The attorneys were also perceived as providing valuable information while being dedicated to their clients' individual projects. Legal services were viewed as having significantly improved over the last 5 years.

### **Areas to Consider for Possible Improvement**

Most of those interviewed felt that the attorneys were as thinly stretched as possible. This caused some individuals to request that we explore options to improve response time to better handle their questions and matters. There were numerous comments from individuals requesting more time with the attorneys to conduct planning and brainstorming sessions. There were a variety of responses that addressed the need to improve the department's public relations and communications.

Though most respondents felt the attorneys worked to structure win-win solutions to legal problems, more than a few wished the attorneys would continue to expand their knowledge of their particular Operating Group's needs. Some interviewees wished that the attorneys would increase the legal staff's ability to assist in achieving certain identified business goals.

Based on the feedback, the legal department developed the following areas in which they might improve upon the delivery of their services.

1. Communication Strategies: The department should consider mechanisms to increase communication with all of its clients. Strategies might include:
  - An electronic newsletter providing updates on current projects.
  - Setting up a more formalized email or messaging response system to keep each client/Operating Group informed as to the status of their specific projects.
  - Meeting with each Operating Group to develop strategies to create a more global, big picture understanding of their needs.
  - Obtaining more feedback from each Operating Group to plan future services and budgets.
  - Creating an electronic mechanism to delineate the areas of expertise of each of the attorneys. This communication piece will also offer suggestions for streamlining services.
  - Making a presentation to each Operating Group to share the findings on how this client feedback process may impact each specific Operating Group.
  
2. Workflow Options: Many comments were received indicating that the attorneys were "very stretched" with regard to their time restraints. Being conscious of budgetary issues, the department might review the attorneys'

time allocations and usage and explore options that would provide more time for individual clients.

3. Human Resources/Employee Issues: The legal department should consider working with Human Resources to analyze the employee evaluation process. The comments from interviewees highlighted several instances where an employee needed to be terminated. The current employee evaluation process made it cumbersome and in some cases very difficult to terminate employees. The department should consider exploring evaluation/termination options with the Human Resources Department.
4. Outside Law Firms: The legal department should consider examining, in greater detail, how it interfaced with one specific problem law firm. A process should be developed to include an evaluation and restructuring of the department's legal operations, service guidelines, alternative fee arrangements, and create an infrastructure for the department to select and fire outside firms going forward.
5. Special Requests: There were five specific requests from individuals that will require individual exploration of particular issues and tailored solutions. Each situation will be discussed in detail at the retreat next month.

### **Conclusions and Next Steps**

The results of the client feedback interviews were very positive. The overwhelming majority of the feedback was highly complimentary and demonstrated that the legal department was serving its clients well. The feedback also allowed the legal department to examine areas that needed to be improved upon and several areas that needed strong follow-up.

One month after the interviews were delivered, the legal department (staff, paralegals, and attorneys) participated in a half-day retreat. We evaluated the results of the Client Feedback Assessment Program and planed appropriate follow-up steps.

All of the attendees participated in the "I-Speak" personality profile program. This process is designed to enhance the understanding of an individual's own communication styles as well as the styles of those individuals with which we work. The purpose is to take this knowledge back to the work place and have increased and more efficient communication with our colleagues.

After this half-day meeting, the attorneys met with each Operating Group to discuss the results of the Client Feedback Program. The most significant outcome of the retreat was the creation of a specific and measurable follow-up plan for each

Operating Group and in some cases, plans were created for specifically identified high-use clients. These plans allowed the legal department to continually review and improve upon the delivery of its services to their clients. In post-retreat evaluations, the corporate clients found the feedback program and follow-up plans to be extremely valuable.

The legal department received kudos from the corporation's executives. It became very apparent that the department was perceived as a true value-added service to this corporation.

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