

Why Attorneys Are Like Mechanics

Understanding the Mindset of a Legal Sales Lead



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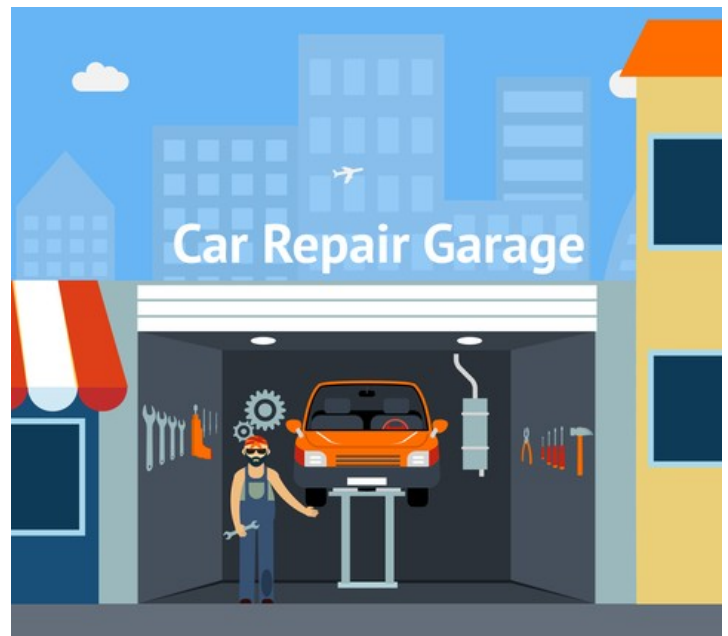
Communication is difficult at best. Communication in a sales conversation is even more complex. Add to that the anxiety felt by a legal lead during a consultation, and the numbers of ways things can go wrong grow exponentially. Sometimes, the oldest trick in the book is the best. In this case, how can we walk a mile in a legal lead's shoes? How can an attorney learn to view the conversation through the mindset of a potential client? The story below might help.

I put it off as long as I could. It was long past 30,000 miles since my car's last major service. I was paying for a wedding, and I needed my little Toyota to keep going as long as possible.

A little sign I kept seeing on the way from home from the interstate popped into my mind, "30K-60K-90K Service Starting at \$199". Knowing I was well past 120K I decided to bypass my pricey dealership and give these guys a try.

I called, only to learn that I hadn't read the sign close enough. "Starting at..." it said. My service would cost about twice as much, but still less than the dealership. The cost was manageable so long as no extra surprises were to come along.

I arrived at the tiny, vintage-looking garage in full defense mode against the young mechanic who held my fate in his hands. I attempted to drop hints that I know engines rather well (I do not). I made it clear I was expecting no surprises (as if he could make that happen). I made eye contact as I left, giving him my best "I am not to be trifled with" gaze (largely ineffective).



I left my 4-cylinder baby in the hands of a stranger. I was a helpless client left to wait on the unknown.

Several hours of silence, suspicion, and imagined scenarios later, bad news assaulted my cell phone. I needed rear brakes and a new serpentine belt. My \$400 repair had jumped to \$1,200. I'm sure the mechanic has developed a natural aloofness as a defense against disappointed, worried customers, but all I wanted in the world was for him to acknowledge that something bad had just happened.



Then came the part where I grilled the mechanic for information on parts and labor and hourly rates and the necessity of each step, extracting information to make up for my lack of understanding.

Then came the point where I considered whether or not my fiancé and I could still pull off the wedding, and the process by which I prepared to break the news to her.

Then came the moment I calmed down and remembered I have a credit card.

Whatever the outcome, it would always be the mechanic's fault for heaping my car's self-inflicted, naturally-incurred wounds upon me.

Unfair? You bet. Could there have been a different outcome for the car? Nope. But could the experience have been different?

Common Ground with the Client

Stop me if you've heard this one...

Q: "What do you call 5000 mechanics at the bottom of the ocean?" "

A: "A good start."

It can help so much to step out of our context and into someone else's shoes. Who can't relate to the uncertainty of laying their future in the hands of a skilled professional? Be it a mechanic, stock broker, or doctor, the basic scenario is the same.

We spend a lot of time at 4LegalLeads performing quality checks with leads, receiving an earful of how they feel about their encounters with attorneys. A legal lead comes to the attorney full of fear and distrust. No one likes to feel helpless at a critical moment in their lives, and no one likes being forced to trust a stranger. Whether it's child custody, a possible prison sentence, or a life-changing amount of money on the line, the needs are the same.



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The Odds Are Against You

Through no fault of your own, a lead arrives to you feeling helpless, out-of-control, and uncertain of the outcome of a high-stakes situation.

Attorneys have an unfair, bad rap, and it's not just a stereotype or a canon of classic jokes. It's fact. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2013 landed lawyers squarely at the bottom of all professions when participants were asked what professions "contribute a lot to society's well-being." In fact, between 2009 and 2013 the numbers dropped from 23% to 18% in the same poll. Interestingly enough, a 2014 Gallup poll measured a "very high to high" ranking on the honesty and ethical standards of lawyers at 21%. (To be fair, in another Gallup poll, mechanics just squeaked past the lawyers at 22%.)

Roughly, it sounds as if you can anticipate the automatic distrust of every four out of five legal leads.

Is all of this unfair if you are an honest, hardworking practitioner of law? Sure, but is it less personal if it's not about you and more about a basic, human situation at hand? Through no fault of your own, a lead arrives to you feeling helpless, out-of-control, and uncertain of the outcome of a high-stakes situation. That's what they're reacting to. You just have the unfortunate privilege of wearing a bulls-eye on your face.



Turn It Around and Land the Lead

Here are critical shifts in thinking about the attorney-client relationship that can help remove the target on your forehead and turn things around.

From Voiceless to Heard

This is number one. What's the first desire of someone who feels they've been treated unjustly? To be heard. Attorneys are people with answers, and it's all too tempting to start dishing them out to a legal lead before it's time. We encounter many people who have walked away from wonderful, qualified attorneys when even a few extra minutes of skilled listening could have made the difference.

Here's a simple guideline – ask as many questions as you can before you start offering answers.

Here's another – ask yourself if you have properly acknowledged any sense of loss the lead has experienced before talking solution and strategy.

From Client to Colleague

No one likes to feel condescended to – even in the healthiest of ways. What language can you use and what kind of cues can you give that you are a partner in this endeavor? Attorneys feel a tremendous amount of pressure to prove their worth to a client. What happens if you release the pressure to appear as an expert and instead appear as an advocate?

From Uneducated to Empowered

How well can you educate the potential lead? How much can you teach them about the process at hand so that they feel part of it? How can you get ahead of the curve and volunteer information before the client feels they have to extract it?

From Opaque to Transparent

People can sniff manure a mile away. Unfortunately, the well-intended act of pulling punches or casting an optimistic glaze on a situation can smell the same. How realistic can you be with the legal lead about their prospects? How realistic of a range can you give them up-front of what the services may cost? How can you manage the risk that you client will feel surprised at a negative outcome?

From Aloof to Aware

Detachment from a case and its outcome is a handy and effective defense technique, but it can read to the client as a lack of concern or care. How do you invest in a client without losing perspective or promoting some sort of co-dependent relationship?

The very simple act of remaining aware of the client's view goes a long way. What feels like days between phone calls to you feels like weeks to them. What feels like another loss to you is THE loss to them. You can be sensitive to their viewpoint without having to share it.

Conclusion

For some people, the kind of thinking trends above are natural, but even to the gifted it's hard to remember the basics of seeing through someone else's eyes when you're staring at the work piled on your own desk. These are learned behaviors, practiced behaviors, but if ingrained they will shine brightly from the first moment you make contact with a legal lead. It's what they're looking for, and that could make all the difference in landing the next case.



About 4LegalLeads.com

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