

# Maximizing The Value Of Your Attorney

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In any team or relationship, we are only as strong as our weakest link. While building effective teams inside your management office is obviously essential, it is too easy to gloss over the equally necessary team building you must do with all your regular vendors, both tradespeople and professionals.

For many, the use of an attorney, for example, is seen as a costly annoyance and an expense that many choose to defer or a function that they opt to engage as little as possible. When they do choose to hire, many think that attorneys can do everything on their own and the job of the operator/client is completed with the act of retention. This is a failure of bringing team making to this, one of your most crucial relationships as a property manager.

Depending on how you work with your attorneys, you can take excellent attorneys and reduce them to just good, if you are average operator or if you are the master of your specialty, you can make even a merely average attorney shine. Great attorneys don't become great at the closing table or in the courtroom. It is the preparation in the office that enables the greatness to come through in the endgame. Your greatest contribution to that effort therefore comes in enabling stellar preparation.

Who is the "best" client? It is one who operates with integrity, does homework, prepares, organizes, honestly assesses, maintains clear vision, communicates, learns from experience, and acknowledges the attorneys' efforts. Following are some steps on how to develop these characteristics to maximize the value of your attorney and turn yourself into the "best" client.

This process can be used for all assignments, such as contract preparation, negotiations, and litigation. As the client, if you have the ambition and commitment to achieve your legal objective, you must pursue becoming the "best" client.

## Operate With Integrity

The best in any industry operate with the highest levels of integrity. They choose to surround themselves with people of similar values. If your attorney knows that you always live and work on the "moral high ground" it eliminates any doubt in the validity of the information you provide them.

Thus they are able to focus on the plan and execution of your matter. Having integrity means being totally honest and truthful in every part of your life. Integrity is the foundation of character. A clear mark of people who have high integrity is that they always do the highest quality of work in everything they do.

Also key to the quality of integrity is candor. Your attorneys must be kept informed of both the strengths and weaknesses of your positions. Many attorneys can repair bad things, but blindsiding them hobbles their ability to do so.

## Do Your Homework

If your knowledge of an area of law is deficient, and you hire the "best attorney" your attorney will often have to spend a significant amount of time educating you and trying to gather information on your behalf. This is often not an efficient use of their time. You should read about the subject matter and learn from history.

Learn what matters have succeeded and which have failed. Find out what were the factors that influenced both sets of results. The more you raise the bar on your understanding of the subject matter, the more the quality of conversation becomes elevated. When listening to your attorney explaining the field, avoid hearing what you want to hear; seek to hear what you need to hear.

## Prepare And Organize

Once you have invested the time and learned about the subject matter. You must now gather and organize all the information your attorney will need in order to represent you effectively. You should show your lawyer everything related to the matter even if unasked for. You have to organize it in a system that the lawyer can easily go thru. You should give this to the lawyer in the inception of the assignment.

This requires you to have excellent record keeping and a system to document all incidents related to your opposition. This saves you money on two sides. First, the person who first knows the data probably knows how to organize it more efficiently. Second, your in-house people can probably organize it more inexpensively than your attorney can.

## Hire A Specialist

When you choose which attorney to retain, it's important to match the type of work with an attorney who specializes in that field. Thus, a lawyer who has done 10,000 hours of contracts will have a different skill set and mastery than an attorney that has done countless hours in environmental litigation.

A specialist in your needed field will be more efficient, have a greater mastery in the area of law, be more likely to prevent problems arising, and be a greater value for your money than an attorney whom you may just "like," but building and maintaining a rapport is important. Law firms often have their office structure built around the type of work that they do, resulting in a more efficient system for the type of work that they handle.

Performing due diligence analysis of your potential attorneys prior to hiring them will save you time and money in the long run. Research their track record, pricing structure, and have them give you an opinion prior to utilizing them for a project. You can audition them on a smaller, less important project. Having confidence and trust in your chosen professional is bedrock prior to commencing any major project. While you must strive to become the “best” client, you want to hire the “best” attorney for your specific needs. History is the best predictor of the future; study their history.

### Assessment And Vision

Once your attorney has received the file and reviewed it, the two of you should speak about the quality of the case. You need to establish the strengths, weaknesses, risks, and goals related to the matter. We want to establish a unified vision of what we can realistically achieve. All successes start with a plan. The two of you must be rigorous in your analysis of what you have and what you are planning to execute.

### Set A Regimen

There should be a regular correspondence on the progress made from both you and your attorney. The nature of the matter will dictate the appropriate time frame for communication. Some matters need hourly updates, others monthly. Most things fall between these two extremes.

These regular communications should cover both recent events and plans for the ensuing period. Prior to every event, there should be a discussion as to the goals, plans for various scenarios that may arise. There has to be a timeline that both of you agree on for the controllable items. While you can't control a court calendar, for example, you can control when your work will be ready prior to the next event. Both you and your attorney must be accountable to the deadlines related to the set tasks.

### Develop A Template

After each conversation with your attorney, you will learn more about the subject matter and what information your professional is seeking. This should be added to your checklist for future cases. After a few of these cases, your checklist of what to provide should be significantly refined from your initial version.

For example, for a retail lease, in the first one you did, you only provided copies of ID's and some general terms. By the third lease, you should have a template outlining everything your attorney will need in order to prepare a lease. By creating such a template, you are creating a system of how to work together. Each assignment should have its unique template, completed and submitted to the attorney at project inception.

### After Action Review

At the completion of each assignment both parties need to discuss what was done well and most importantly where did you fail. Each shortcoming provides an opportunity for growth. For example, if you needed but lacked surveillance footage for a holdover case and it compromised your end result, you want to make sure for every case thereafter that you have planned and incorporated surveillance video prior to giving the info to your attorney.

Although it seems obvious, it must be noted that attorneys want more than their fees. If they put in extraordinary efforts on your behalf, they want to hear a word of thanks. But no amount of verbal thanking will make up for tardy fee payment.

### Conclusion

On a superficial level, you may have increased your workload and taken on the onus from your attorney. But in fact, you have now given your attorney the opportunity to focus on the execution of the legal matter. Your great attorneys will now be able to use their expertise on executing the plan.

Your attorney fees in the long run will be lower, you will achieve your results quicker, and your attorneys will thank you for saving their time from miniscule matters. If you want to maximize the value of your attorneys you need to become their most knowledgeable and efficient client.

### About Stratco Property Group

*STRATCO is a third party fee operator and consultancy specializing in repositioning highly complex and distraught situations in the NYC Multi-Family Housing Industry. Its experience hardened methods bring order and system to situations of chaos and fragmentation. Carefully listening to the stakeholders' goals, STRATCO studies, analyzes and investigates all documents involved throughout the history of each property, evaluating them in the context of achieving those goals. STRATCO develops and executes highest and best use business plans for its clients based on their unique requirements (time horizon, property circumstances, litigation concerns, and capital budget). STRATCO's staff's deep understanding of real estate and organizational skills have time and again proven bring to fruition even the most complex strategies on-time and within budget.*

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