



I have an affection for one particular section of the California Civil Code. The venerable Maxims of Jurisprudence (Cal. Civ. Code Division 4, Part 4, § 3509 *et seq.*), contain such gems as: The law disregards trifles (§ 3533); For every wrong there is a remedy (§ 3523); and my personal favorite, Superfluity does not vitiate (§ 3537).

Pithy, and a bit preposterous, but food for thought. These aphorisms have inspired me to propose what I call the Maxims of Corporate Success. In the spirit of the Maxims of Jurisprudence, I've organized my Maxims into four parts, the first of which I'll explore now.

Maximums of Corporate Success

BY MICHAEL SHPIZNER

Conquer Unmet Expectations

When your client (or boss) expects you to meet a deadline, and you don't, what's the result? Frustration and disappointment. Well, you can't avoid expectations. What you *can* do is take charge of the expectation-setting process. Here are three key steps:

1. Make clear promises to take actions within your control and within an explicit timeframe that you can realistically, confidently, commit to.
2. Do as you promised.
3. Communicate, early and often. If the timeframe is long, give frequent updates, (e.g., check in weekly on a month-long project). But most important, if the timeframe is in jeopardy, SAY SO IMMEDIATELY! Explain what has happened, and negotiate a new deadline that you can realistically, confidently, commit to. Think of it this way: Agreed-upon deadlines are contracts. If you miss your promised delivery date, you are in breach. But if you renegotiate the contract first, you are on track to completing the new agreement.

Be Purposeful

I appreciate George Harrison's song lyric: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." Purpose-free adventure is great fun—on vacation. But in the workplace, we need to be purpose-driven. That's why they call it work! When in doubt, ask yourself: "What is the purpose of doing this?" If you don't know the answer, find out.

Develop and Demonstrate a Bias for Action

You can add much more value when you anticipate

your clients' needs. Respond to implicit as well as explicit requests. Don't just describe problems—propose solutions. Go the extra mile. For example, if you propose sending a letter, take the time to prepare and circulate a draft.

Learn to Balance Reaction and Reflection

For in-house counsel, *response time is crucial*. Fight against the lawyer's tendency to wait until all the facts are in, all the issues are spotted, and all the options are analyzed before getting back to the client. The problem with this style is that, while you're working the matter, the client is getting progressively more anxious to hear from you. To develop a more client-centric style, honor:

$$\text{The Respectfulness Algorithm } R = \frac{1}{T}$$

That is, the amount of Respect that you show is inversely proportional to the amount of Time that it takes you to get back to your client. Want to show a lot of respect? Respond right away. Want to show very little? Wait a good long time.

Wondering how to communicate with the client *before* all the facts are in, all the issues spotted, and all the options analyzed? Easy! Develop the "Will Do" reflex. As soon as possible after receiving a request, shoot back an email or voicemail telling the requestor that you're "on the case." Clients and bosses love that! "Will Do"—A seven-character email message that can make a huge difference in your client relationships.

Master the Rice Krispies Principle

In-house practice is like breakfast cereal. (You knew that, right?) Here's what I mean: In in-house practice, as in breakfast cereals, *Crisp is good! Soggy, not so good*. Make your client communications *crisp*. Be concise and specific. Practice the art of the executive summary: If your subject matter is complex, start with a quick overview; *then* give the full analysis.

Make Your Meetings Crisp, Not Soggy

Have you ever wondered why meetings always last at least 30 minutes, even if they have only 10–15 minutes' worth of content? Answer: *Because these are soggy meetings*. Crisp up your meetings by being purposeful—*always have an agenda*. Keep the discussion on point; redirect those who tend to stray; end the meeting with a quick recap of actions, responsibilities, and ETAs; thank people for their time; and GET OUTTA THERE!

My focus in the next column will be on managing relationships. In the meantime, I encourage you to try out any of the ideas here that seem helpful to you. Thanks for reading, and please let me know how it goes! 