

LEGAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT: ATP 106

LECTURE 4

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FRONT OFFICE MANAGEMENT

- The front office is the first location that anyone who is visiting the office sees.
- It forms the first impression of an institution / organization.
- It is also known as lobby or reception area
- It is crucial to have a properly designed front office that is staffed with properly trained employees.
- Due to globalization, the Kenyan market has been opened to competition and additional scrutiny therefore organizations intending to compete on the global market have to ensure that their standards are perceived as global standards.

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Definition of front office services

".....business-related activities conducted at the front desk including customer services, sales and marketing, finance and technical services etc."

Kimani Mury, (2019), Legal Practice Management, Nairobi, Kenya: LawAfrica Publishing (K) Ltd at page 13

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OFFICE RECEPTION / LOBBY

- This office is located at the front entrance and is the first point of contact with customers and should therefore look impressive.
- Importance of a Reception: -
 - attracts visitors and customers because it is well decorated
 - gives the company a good image and reputation
 - saves the customer's time by giving them the right information or guiding them to the right officer
 - serves as a security check.

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Reception Office Layout

Refers to the facilities provided in the reception office including: -

- Lounge
- Telephone
- Flowers and Decorations
- Visitors Register
- Computer
- Diary / Appointment Book
- Reading Material

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- Calendar and wall clock
- Telephone Directory
- Year planner
- Message pad / Book
- Other facilities
 - washrooms,
 - pay phones,
 - water dispensers,
 - vending machines etc.

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Reception procedures

These are the rules to be followed when attending to visitors e.g.: -

- Welcome the visitor
- Enquire about his / her name and how you can be of assistance
- solve his / her problem
- Ask the visitor to sign the callers register and give him / her a badge.
- If he / she needs to see an officer, ask if he / she has an appointment.
- Offer the visitor a seat at the lounge.
- Call the officer concerned and inform him about the visitor.
- If the officer is available, ask the messenger to escort the visitor to his / her office.

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- If the officer is unavailable or unwilling to meet, ask the visitor to leave a message.
 - If the visitor wishes to make an appointment, record it in the diary.
 - When the visitor is departing find out if he / she was attended to and wish him / her a good day.
- ❖ *How would you deal with unexpected visitors, visitors having an emergency and unwanted visitors?*
- ❖ *What challenges can the reception office face and how they can be overcome?*

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CENTRALISATION OF OFFICE FUNCTIONS

- Offices with related services can be situated in a central office.
- The advantages include: -
 - Economy in the use of office equipment and machinery.
 - Equal distribution of work which reduces the need for overtime.
 - Encourages specialization as qualified people are employed.
 - There is uniformity of work i.e. tasks are done in a standardized way.
 - There is economy in staffing because fewer workers are required in a centralized office.
 - There is no duplication of work i.e. every department performing similar tasks.

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- Advantages cont.....
- It is easier to cater for staff absenteeism because work is distributed among the present staff.
 - Easy supervision; It is easier to monitor the workers.
 - Easy training of new workers as they can learn from each other.
 - Better communication and smooth flow of work because people performing similar tasks sit together.
 - Job flexibility is possible due to job rotation as employees can be given other jobs within the department.
 - Better control of office resources and records because they can be closely monitored.

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- The disadvantages include: -
 - Too much movement from one department to another trying to locate the centralised office.
 - Unsuitable for confidential work because there is no privacy.
 - There is no accountability in case of a mistake.
 - There is the possibility of misplacement of records due to a high volume of records in a central office.
 - There are delays i.e. It takes a lot of time to extract records in a central office.
 - High cost of messengers who are needed to distribute work to user departments.
 - Due to uniform procedures, there is lack of flexibility in the way work is done.

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- Disadvantages cont.....
- High risk of loss for the company in case of a disaster like fire.
 - Noise disturbance from noisy machines.
 - Inconvenience to the user departments because it does not enter for special needs.
 - Lack of exposure to other departments and senior executives which may hinder job development.
 - Boredom and monotony since workers perform the same tasks everyday.

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- ### Centralised services
- Centralized services include: -
- Typing pool
 - Filing registry
 - Mailing services
 - Mail room equipment
 - Telephone switchboard
 - Other devices used for communication.

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- Types of telephone switchboards
 - PBX – Private Branch Exchange
 - PMBX – Private Manual Branch Exchange.
 - PABX – Private Automatic Branch Exchange
- Components of a modern switchboard include: -
 - The main switchboard unit
 - Telephone headset
 - Telephone hand set
 - Answering machine

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- Other devices used for communication include: -
- Answering Machine
 - Voice Mail
 - Radio Pager
 - Radio Calls
 - Mobile Phone
 - Fax (Facsimile transfer)
 - Telex / teleprinter
 - E-Mail (Electronic Mail)
- ❖ *What factors are considered when deciding to centralize office services?*

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Decentralisation / Departmentation

- This is where each department provides its own services.
- The advantages include: -
 - Suitable for work of a confidential nature
 - No delays in retrieving information.
 - There is spreading of risks in case of disaster.
 - Minimizes movement of workers from one office to another.
 - More accountability in case of mistakes.
 - Less noise as compared to a centralized office.
 - It reduces boredom and monotony of work due to a variety of tasks.

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• Advantages cont.....

- There is economy in the use of messengers since work does not have to be distributed.
- It allows each department to cater for its specialised needs.
- There is an opportunity to exploit new talents because employees are exposed to different tasks.
- It improves the person's contacts with other workers and executives

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• The disadvantages include: -

- Uneconomical in the use of machines and equipment.
- There is duplication of work.
- It is difficult to supervise because each worker has different tasks.
- Hinders smooth flow of work.
- Difficult to train new workers.
- Hinders specialization.
- No uniformity of work and this hinders efficiency.
- Difficult to handle staff absenteeism.
- Uneconomical in staffing.
- Lack of flexibility in terms of job rotation.
- Unequal distribution of work leading to overtime work.

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CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Customer service is an important aspect for a law firm to properly function.

"Legal work does not exist in the abstract, apart from real people with real problems. Practice development is ultimately client development."

Munnell, G.A., 2013). Introduction to Law Practice: Organizing and Managing Legal Work; West Publishing Co (4th Edition) at page 198

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"Underlying the effective management of people is the requirement for a clear understanding of the nature of the business that the organization is engaged in and how best to provide customer or customer satisfaction.the context of organizational setting is central to the application of organizational behavior and the process of management. It is the interaction of people in order to achieve objectives that forms the basis of the particular organization."

Mullins, L.J.; (2010); Management & Organizational Behavior; Pearson Education Limited (9th Ed) at page 452

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Client-centered lawyering

❖ Can we deal with clients the same way as how our predecessors dealt with them?

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- **NO.** Social media has placed a lot of information has been placed in the hands of potential clients.
- When a client approaches a law-firm, irrespective of the information that they have at hand, they still require assistance to solve a problem

"The lawyer's role as a problem solver is usually overlooked in this era of adversarial tactics, but it is central to the concept of client service. On a human level, the needs of Lincoln's clients and our clients today are not all that different."

Munneke, G.A., 2013, Introduction to Law Practice: Organizing and Managing Legal Work, West Publishing Co (4th Edition) at page 159

- Munneke scrutinizes the primordia of the advocate-client relationship.

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- Legal problems belong to the client but the advocate's responsibility is to carry out/ fulfill the client's objectives while helping him / her solve his / her problems.

"An advocate, by the sacred duty which he owes his client, knows in the discharge of that office but one person in the world – the client and none other. To save the client by all expedient means, to protect the client at all hazards and costs to all others and among others to himself, is the highest and most unquestioned of his duties; and he must not regard the alarm, the suffering, the torment, the destruction, which he may bring on any other. Nay, separating even the duties of a patriot from those of an advocate and casting them if need be to the wind, he must go on reckless of the consequences, if his fate it should unhappily be to involve his country in confusion for his client's protection."

Lord Brougham

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- There is no complete codification of obligations of an advocate to clients;
 - > statutes impose some obligations,
 - > other are imposed by ethics,
 - > others are exercised as a matter of practice and tradition.

- The obligations of an advocate are dynamic therefore;
 - > an advocate is always to act with caution when in doubt,
 - > when looking for the obligations, look beyond the statute.See: *Norton v Ashburton (1914) AC 932*

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Duties of the advocate to the client

- These duties include: -
 - > Confidentiality
 - ✓ sections 134, 135, 136 and 137 of the Evidence Act.
 - ✓ *King Woolen Mills and Another v. Kaplan and Stratton Advocates Nairobi Civil Appeal No. 55 of 1993.*
 - > Honest and good faith
 - > Effective representation / zealous advocacy
 - > Follow the directions of the client
 - > Keep client informed
 - ✓ Rule 4 of the 1998 Advocates (Practice) Rules.

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Duties cont....

- > Disclose profit
 - ✓ *United Insurance Co. Ltd v Dorcas Amungain Nairobi HCCC No. 462 of 2000*
 - ✓ *Kenya Bus Services Ltd v Susan Muteti Nairobi CA No. 15 of 1992*
- > Disclose conflict of interest
 - ✓ *King Woolen Mills and Another v Kaplan and Stratton Advocates Nairobi Civil Appeal No. 55 of 1993*
- > Due care and diligence
 - ✓ *Abraham v. Justsun [1963] 2 All ER 401 at p.404*
 - ✓ *Ross v Caunters [1970] 3 AER 580*
 - ✓ *Gran Gelato Ltd v Richelliff (Group) Ltd (1992) Ch 560*
 - ✓ *Flavio Rodrigues v Apollo Insurance Nairobi HCC No. 431 of 2002*
 - ✓ *Hedley Byrne v Heller & Partners [1963] 2 All E.R. 575*

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Why look into the relevance of client-centered lawyering in a legal practice management course?

- The Advocate-client relationship defines the management approach that will be adopted by a law-firm.
- Client-centered lawyering implies that if advocates fulfill their client's objectives, clients will be satisfied with the results thus: -
 - > guaranteeing repeat business
 - > guaranteeing that these clients will refer additional clients

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- Client-centered lawyering relies on effective communication thus offering the most opportunities for problem resolution within the limits of the law.
- Open communication allows the client to appreciate the advocate's efforts on the client's behalf by: -
 - > billing regularly and in detail,
 - > focusing on action items rather than on time spent
 - > communicating value in the overall bill

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Managing Client Relations

- ❖ What should advocates do to build positive relationships with the clients?
- ❖ Is it always that a client seeks out the services of the advocate to ensure that he / she wins?
- In managing client relations, it is important to understand: -
 - use of engagement letters
 - fees and billing

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ROLE OF ICT IN CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGEMENT.

Definition of ICT:

"Technological means of collecting (inputting / gathering), collating (Processing / analyzing) and conveying (outputting / transferring) information via technology."

Ajay, O.O., (2019), E-learning: A Shorter, Safer And Surer Route To Reaching The Education For All Destination, Journal of Science and Technical Education (JSTE), Akungba, Vol 1 No. 1 Pages 138 – 145 available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311933254_Definition_of_ICT

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The role can be summarized as: -

- Better client engagement thus leading to customer satisfaction;
- Better data collection;
- Better service delivery;
- Online services for customers / clients e.g. via use of media technology;
- Constant availability of services due to increased use of digital devices;
- Low cost customer service management;
- Positive effects in business establishment;
- Appeals to a number of customers thus leading to an increase in the client base and consequently increased profits.

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MODERN TRENDS IN CSM.

These include: -

- Crisis Management Customer Service
- Chatbots & Artificial Intelligence
- Remote & Freelance Customer Service Agents
- Higher Focus on Customer Success
- Customer Self-Service
- Social Media Customer Service
- Real-Time Customer Support
- Personalized Customer Service
- Video & Streaming
- Omnichannel Support Systems

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FIRM ASSIGNMENT

For an office to properly function, it must be run by human beings. It is therefore important to understand the different categories of people who work in an office. With this in mind, discuss the different types of personell that are found in an office, attributes to look for during employment and the responsibilities of their job roles.