

ing. Don't use a negative remark as an opening "to bang the competition."

Have you been happy enough with our services to work with us again?

If the answers have been negative up to now, don't ask that, she says. "Don't put the client in the spot of having to say no." But if the interview has been mostly positive, go ahead with it.

What to listen for is whether the client is aware of the firm's other services. So if the answer is "yes we'd consider hiring you for a similar matter," very likely the client doesn't know what other services are available.

But again, this is not the time to market. Start talking about the firm and its expertise in other areas and the client will see the whole effort as a poorly veiled sales pitch. Just ask what the client needs and plan to call later to discuss how the firm can meet those needs.

Finally, if there has been a problem, ask one more question:

I understand you had a problem with X. Has that been resolved to your satisfaction?

And if the answer is no, Wagner says, "get it resolved."

AN ONGOING FOLLOW-UP

Afterwards, send a letter thanking the client for taking time to do the interview. If issues have been raised, mention them and tell what the firm is doing to address them.

But don't stop with the letter, Wagner says.

Use the information in the firm's marketing. Keep reviewing the remarks. Look for trends. Solve the problems. Keep doing what's working. ❖

How to set staff goals that improve performance but also benefit the firm

Now's the time to set staff goals.

Law firms often don't do that, says **JEANNETTE SWIST**, principal consultant of Applied Resource Management, a human resource and organizational development consulting firm in Naperville, IL.

Most firms set goals for the attorneys and stop there, leaving staff to plod along without any encouragement for improvement.

Goals are essential for staff, she says.

But to make them work, the administrator has to set

them right, monitor them right, and reward them right. Here's how.

THE GROUND RULES FOR GOALS

Goals have to follow rules, Swist says. Otherwise, they are fruitless. They won't improve staff performance, and they won't provide any benefit for the firm. She lists these.

- **Goals have to be challenging.**

"That means they have to go beyond the job description." There's nothing to be gained by asking people to do no more than what's required. The firm just ends up "rewarding staff for doing what they are already compensated for."

And many employers do just that, she says. One client, for example, set goals of shipping so many packages a day when the shipping was already part of the job.

- **Goals have to be specific.**

It's not enough to say "improve productivity" or "do better filing." The directive has to go deeper and cite a particular task, preferably a task related to some skill the staffer needs to improve. It might be to set up a system for personal time management or to learn a new software program.

- **Goals have to be measurable.**

They have to be measurable to the extent that both the staffer and the administrator can evaluate the progress during the process and at the end.

Staff have to be able to see where they are. There's no incentive to work on their goals if they have to wait around for the administrator to declare that the goals have been reached.

- **Goals have to be attainable.**

"Employees need to be confident they can achieve the goals." Otherwise, their response is going to be a very logical "why bother?"

- **Goals have to be tied to the firm's goals.**

Learning a new software program might be a lofty ambition, but if it doesn't make any difference to the firm's bottom line if that staffer knows the software or not, that doesn't qualify as a goal.

- **There has to be a specific time frame for reaching the goals.**

It may be monthly or annually, but the staffer and administrator need to have a point at which they can verify success.

- **There can't be obstacles that will impede the staffer's success.**

For example, it's pointless to ask the secretaries to get their attorneys' bills out sooner if the billing department isn't working with the secretaries to help them do that.

- **There has to be a reward.**

It can be an individual reward or a group reward,