



**WORLD-CLASS  
SERVICE**

Presented to  
The Florida Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers  
Grand Hyatt, Tampa, Florida  
May 4, 2007

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Mark Chinn operates Chinn & Associates, the largest divorce firm in Mississippi. He has received the following distinctions in the field of family law:

- Mid South Super Lawyers. Mark is one of only 15 lawyers selected out of all the lawyers in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi to be a Mid-South Super Lawyer in Family Law.
- The Best Lawyers in America
- Bar Register of Preeminent Lawyers
- Outstanding Lawyers of America. Mark is one of the one hundred attorneys that were selected from Mississippi for membership.

He is the author of two ABA books, *How to Build and Manage a Family Law Practice* and *The Constructive Divorce*. He is also author of a chapter entitled, "Marketing is Not a Dirty Word," in *How to Capture and Keep Clients*, published by the American Bar Association General Practice Solo Section in 2005 and "The Exit Interview" in *101 Practical Solutions for the Family Lawyer* published by the Family Law Section. These publications are available through the American Bar Association at 312-988-6085 or [www.ababooks.org](http://www.ababooks.org).

Mark has been featured in the National *Lawyer's Weekly* Magazine for delivering world-class service. He has been a frequent speaker for the American Bar Association Family Law Section and the Mississippi Bar on issues of family law practice management and delivering world-class service.

Mark was the recipient in 1996 of the Award of Merit for distinguished service to the Bar and the public and was enrolled as a Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation in 1997. Mark has been Chairman of the Family Law Section of the Mississippi Bar twice and is a member of the governing council of the Family Law Section of the American Bar Association. His other work with the Mississippi Bar has included: Chairman in 1995-96 of the Solo and Small Firm Practice Committee, and past service on the Ethics, Client Relations, Women in the Profession, and Fee Dispute Resolution Committees.

Mark was Chairman of the Lamar Order of the University of Mississippi School of Law Alumni Association in 2002. He was President of the Hinds County Bar Association for 1998-99 and is a Master of the Bench in the Charles Clark American Inn of Court. He was elected Vice Chair of the Supreme Court's Gender Fairness Task Force and was appointed by the Governor of Mississippi to the Children's Justice Task Force.

Community activities include: Chairman of the Jackson Urban League Board of Directors (1995-2000); Chairman of the Tenth Jubilee! Jam in May 1996 which featured the Olympic Torch; Jubilee! Jam Foundation Board, Arts Alliance Board, Opera Board and Leadership Jackson.

Mark and his wife of thirty years, Cathy, have four daughters. Mark is a Black belt in Karate and kick boxing and a veteran of the 20 years of Rugby, and a private pilot and when Mark is not sitting on the side of a soccer field or basketball court watching his daughters play, he enjoys golf and weightlifting and piano lessons.

Mark received his undergraduate degree from Iowa State University in 1975 and his Law Degree from the University of Mississippi in 1978. He is admitted to practice in all courts in Mississippi, the Fifth and Seventh Circuits and the United States Supreme Court.

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BY: MARK A. CHINN OF CHINN & ASSOCIATES, PLLC, JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI.

MATERIALS TAKEN FROM *HOW TO START AND BUILD A FAMILY LAW PRACTICE* BY MARK A. CHINN, PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION FAMILY LAW AND LAW PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SECTIONS, WHICH MAY BE ORDERED THROUGH THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION AT 312-988-6085 OR [WWW.ABABOOKS.ORG](http://WWW.ABABOOKS.ORG).

No business can survive without a fixation on service. Businesses should refocus their attention on service. No matter how good your product or service, the satisfaction of the client will be significantly diminished if the delivery of the service is poor.

## FOCUS ON CLIENT SATISFACTION

Businesses focus their attention on how to effectively create their product and how to make a profit. For example, a lawyer might focus his full attention on the legal aspects of a case. He will work hard to evaluate the case, obtain the research, investigate and present the case for court. He may present the best case possible. But, if his client does not feel good about the relationship, all of the excellent legal work goes down the drain. The client will later say, "Well, I guess he did a good job for me, but I wouldn't go back to him because he was mean to me."

When you discuss the delivery of your product, learn to ask yourself and the staff, "Is the client (client) happy?" For example, my associate is reporting to me on the results of a temporary hearing and saying how the result achieved was within the range of desired results. After examining the results and our firm's actions, I might ask the question "Is the client happy?" This is an important question, because both attorneys and reasonable clients know that a perfect result is rarely, if ever possible, so client satisfaction with the result is the final arbiter of a satisfactory result for the client. If the answer is that the client is not happy, then it is appropriate to immediately go into

action to address the client's concerns and educate the client about the reasonable results which could have been achieved. If the client remains unhappy, then that may be a signal that the relationship should be terminated. It is imperative in client service to be constantly asking, "Is the client happy?" and immediately responding if the client is not happy.

## THE RECEPTIONIST

The heartbeat of client service is the receptionist. Service starts and usually ends with the receptionist. Therefore, great care should be taken in hiring and training a receptionist. Your receptionist should appear, dress, sound, act and talk in a manner which is completely consistent with the image of your business. The same is probably true for all employees, but it is critical with the receptionist.

Coach your receptionist to look up and *immediately* smile and acknowledge anyone who enters the reception area. This is critical to ensuring a feeling of welcome. Think about it, if someone came to your home, you would not open the door and not look at them while you talked to someone else on the phone. Instead, you would tell the person on the phone to hold on, and then you would open the door, smile, say, "hello" and say something like, "I'm on the phone, just give me a minute to take care of this." That is exactly how the receptionist should handle it.

## RECEPTION ROOM

Much thought and effort should be put into the waiting area because this is the client's first impression of the office itself. Design the reception area in a manner which is consistent with the mission of your firm and the clients you serve.



The reception area should always be neat. There should be no clutter, no dirty cups or glasses, no papers or files lying about. Magazines should be maintained at all times in neat stacks. Here are some tips for things you can do to create a great reception area:

- Use fine furniture
- Artwork.
- Fountains
- Aquariums
- Fresh Flowers
- Candles
- Potpourri
- Statues
- Historical or family photographs
- Mementoes
- Music

Any reception area should have a selection of magazines. The selection should be designed to interest the clients. The selection should be kept current.

## **GREETING THE CLIENT**

Be prompt. Excellent service requires that clients not wait. Make it a rule for yourself and everyone in your office that clients will not wait. If a client arrives and you are in the middle of crafting some brilliant language in a letter or brief, STOP, and work on it later. Resist the urge to finish your thought. If you are on a telephone call, tell the person you are talking to that you have to get off the phone because you have an appointment.



If it is inevitable that your client has to wait for you, walk to the reception area and explain to the client that you got caught in something and need just a minute before you can begin the appointment. If you cannot do this, have a staff member do it.



## MEETING THE CLIENT

There is no one, right way to greet a client. Some believe the client should be escorted to the professional's office or meeting room. This is probably okay, but I prefer to walk to the reception area myself to greet the client

This conveys to the client that they are important and that I want to go out of my way to welcome them and take care of them. One thing that should never happen is to simply direct or allow the client to a location. I recently stayed at a fine hotel. I was walking around and must have appeared lost. A supervisor of room cleaning saw me, stopped what she was doing and asked if I needed assistance. I said I was going to the ABA Family Law Section reception, but could not find it. She, "Okay, follow me." I said, "Just tell me where it is." She smiled and said, "I would be happy to show you the way." And then she showed me the way. As you can see, this level of service was unforgettable for me.

When greeting clients, look directly into their eyes and smile and say, "Hello, I am (your name), I am glad to see you." Then extend your hand and smile again. A smile makes people feel comfortable. However, be careful not to smile too much or to make light of the client's circumstance. After all, someone entering a divorce office has a very serious problem on their hands.

It is very important to look a client directly in the eyes, but not for too long, as a prolonged stare in the eyes can make a person uncomfortable. But a proper look in

someone's eyes conveys many things. It conveys that you are confident in who you are. It conveys that you are comfortable and so should they be comfortable. Finally, it conveys that you care about who the client is. I like to look at someone's eyes long enough to see what color they are.



## TREAT EMPLOYEES WITH COURTESY

“People treat clients the same way they are treated.”<sup>1</sup> If you yell at your employees, it is not likely they are going to turn around and be sweet to your clients. *Treat employees exactly the way you would a client.* Treat them as though you fully understand that they are really *volunteering* to work for you and do not have to there. I once asked a local Jackson restaurateur how he managed to deliver such fine service in all of his establishments. His reply: “My clients are my employees.” Treating your employees like clients serves to mentor them in service every time you deal with them.

## TREAT EVERYONE WITH COURTESY

Train your staff to treat everyone with courtesy, whether they are friend or foe, client or not. This should take place over the phone, in person, and in all other contacts. Non clients should be treated with the very same courtesy as clients. It is hard to be courteous to one person and not another.

## CREATE AN EXPERIENCE

In the book, *The Experience Economy*, the authors state that “experiences” are a fourth economic offering after commodities, goods and services. They trace the beginnings of a dedication to *experience* to Walt Disney. They write that “companies stage an experience whenever they *engage* customers, connecting with them in a

personal, memorable way.”<sup>2</sup> Consumers are experiencing “experiences” just about every where they go today. Restaurants, movie theaters, theme parks, beauty salons and spas, and even car dealers are selling an experience. In today’s economy, no one is interested in buying a commodity; they buy feelings.<sup>3</sup>

Businesses and professionals must learn the fundamental rule of client satisfaction: “The competition is anyone the client compares you with.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, you should do what you can to create an experience which is unsurpassed by any other competitor. Creating an “experience” is one way to do that.

How does one create an “experience?” First, take some time and think about the clients you intend to serve. What do they really need? What do they need that they don’t even know they need?

Creating an experience in your firm is limited only by your dedication and passion to your clients and your imagination. Look for ways to create your own, unique, “experience.”

#### Footnotes

1. Connellan, Tom, *Inside the Magic Kingdom*, p. 96 (Austin, TX: Bard Press, 1997)
2. Pine, Joseph B., III, and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, p. 3 (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999)
3. Gerber, Michael E., *The E-Myth Revisited*, p. 155 (New York: Harper-Collins, 1995)
4. Connellan, *Inside the Magic Kingdom*, p. 23

