

## Secretary Woes.

By Russ Ipsa

Our regular business hours have always been 8 to 4:30, but my new secretary was being undependable and irresponsible. She was rolling in at 8:30 or so every morning and would slip out early every afternoon – usually by 4:00. It was time for me to straighten this out, so I scheduled a meeting with her at 3:00 on a Friday. I was ready for conflict. It was time to get the office back on track.

“Well, come on in,” I said as she came into my office. “I thought we would have a little talk about the hours for the office – and for you.”

“I figured you’d notice and would want to have a little discussion about it,” she said.

“Yes, a little discussion,” I said with some trepidation. “I thought we should talk this over. It seems you have been coming in at 8:30 and leaving by 4:00 every day, when you know that our office hours are 8 to 4:30.”

“I know. I think this has been an effective strategy, don’t you?” she asked.

I was perplexed. “Strategy? What strategy?”

“Well, as you know, I have been taking this marketing class, and I decided to put what I have learned into practice,” she said.

“And what have you learned?”

“Because lawyers sell a service and not a product, people don’t understand what they are getting and why the fees are so high,” she said with a smile. “It’s the hard work and personal attention that impresses clients the most.”

“I get that. But what has that got to do with your hours?”

“It’s all about perception, you see,” she said excitedly. “I’m able to tell clients that you are always the first in and the last out of the office. You even beat me here every day.”

“Well, that’s true, unfortunately, but how is that a marketing strategy?”

“Clients see that you are a hard worker – you go the extra mile. Anyone can have a secretary open up the office and do all of the work, but you give clients the extra attention.”

“I do, but that is not by choice, you know.”

“It doesn’t matter. The point is that clients see you as the kind of lawyer that they deserve – the kind they are willing to pay for.” At this point, she pulled out an Excel spread sheet. “Now just look at the revenue we have been experiencing for the past six months – the time since I came here. Look, I’ve even produced a graph showing the revenue curve.”

I was, frankly, surprised. It looked like our revenue had grown by ten per cent in the past six months. I couldn’t explain it. It didn’t seem like I had any big surge in my caseload.

“This is working perfectly,” she said. “I have implemented a marketing strategy that has increased our revenue by 10% with no additional cost to you. Isn’t this great?”

“Well, I’m not sure that it is related to your hours, is it?” I asked.

“What else has changed?” she asked. “Name one other thing that is different.”

“I guess I don’t know,” I conceded.

“Absolutely, and do you want to explore the real potential of this?” she said with a big smile on her face.

“I guess so,” I said with some hesitation.

At this point, she whipped out another graph showing an even greater revenue curve. “These are my projections of what we can expect to happen on the revenue end with some minor adjustments. You see, I think we can raise our revenue by over 25% in a year.”

Now, I was starting to get excited. “Wow, do you think this is really possible?”

“Yes,” she said quickly. “It is all based on data. It’s based on what has happened in the past 6 months. It assumes only a minor adjustment in what we do.”

“What kind of minor adjustment?” I asked. “I mean, I would be willing to do a lot if we can increase revenue by 25%.”

“The adjustment is to have me come in a little later and leave a little earlier. Say, in at 9:00 or 9:15 and out by 3:30. What do you think?”

“Well, I don’t know. Do you really think this will work?”

“Sure. Look at the data. It’s going to work,” she said with confidence.

“Well, I guess we can’t argue with data. Let’s give it a try,” I said. “Anything else?”

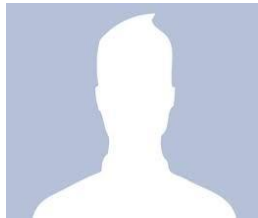
“Well, only one other thing,” she said with a grin. “This marketing strategy goes way beyond the normal legal secretary duties, so I think I should be compensated for the extra work. Say, an increase of 10% in my salary. That’s not bad when I came up with an idea that increases revenue by 25% is it?”

“Well, I suppose that’s fair,” I said. “When do you want to start the new system?”

She looked at her watch. “Well, it’s 3:30 right now, so let’s start it right away, and I’ll head out right now. We can wait with the pay raise until next week.”

“Sounds fair to me,” I said.

The meeting didn’t go quite like I expected, but who can argue with success?



Russ Ipsa is an Iowa attorney and member of the Iowa State Bar Association. Most of the time, he thinks he is a successful practitioner but always enjoys his legal career.