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Are Satisfied Clients Loyal Clients?

Surveying client needs can improve retention

BY JEAN MARIE CARAGHER

In today's booming economy, when your firm has more business than you can handle, are you paying attention to current client satisfaction? If not, you should. A multi-industry study by consultant Frederick Reichheld found that between 65% and 85% of customers who chose a new supplier professed themselves satisfied or very satisfied with their old supplier. What this means is that we cannot equate customer *satisfaction* with customer *loyalty*.

Client Satisfaction Programs

No matter what size your firm is, every CPA firm should have a client satisfaction program in place. And because no two firms are alike, client satisfaction programs should be developed with *your* firm's objectives in mind. For example, client satisfaction programs can be developed to address many firmwide or practice area goals:

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- Ensure overall client satisfaction;
- Increase visibility for specific niches or services;
- Target new business opportunities; and
- Evaluate client satisfaction after a merger or transition of engagement teams.

However, do not ask your clients for their input if you do not plan to follow up with them. "We've seen a lot more progress in people getting client feedback," says David Maister, a consultant to the accounting profession. "Yet, the ridiculous mistake they're making is

doing nothing with it. That is not only neutral, it is absolutely disastrous."

Types of Client Satisfaction Programs

Client satisfaction surveys can take many forms, including in-person interviews; telephone surveys; mailed and faxed surveys; and, now, email surveys. The Client Satisfaction Program developed for Sax Macy Fromm & Co., PC (Clifton, NJ) in 1998 is composed of three components: surveys, roundtable series, and specialized mailings.

Surveys

- **Personal Interviews:** The first step in Sax Macy Fromm & Co.'s Client

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