

OMG! Text Me, Please!

By Erica W. Harris

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

—George Bernard Shaw

You can be brilliant and do fabulous work but you'll never succeed if you do not communicate with your partners.

Partners want to know what you are doing. Have you been sent out of town to review client documents in a warehouse for a week? Don't just update your FB (Facebook, for the older generation) status with complaints of how awful document review is. Tell your partner what you are seeing, how the review is going, any important documents you are finding, and when you expect to finish.

Are you supporting your partner in court? Don't just sit there like you are watching a movie—take notes so you can report to him later: When did the judge seem unconvinced or intrigued? What doors did opposing counsel open through their statements to the court? What will the trial team need to do to follow up on the court's questions after the hearing?

Partners want to know if you do not understand the assignment. Were you just given a project and yet have no clue as to what your partner actually wants? Don't be George Costanza in the "Bottle Deposit," looking for clues about your work assignment. Ask! Ask the partner to put the assignment in an e-mail so that you can be sure to meet her expectations exactly. Ask whether the partner wants highlighted cases, an e-mail summary, or a formal memorandum for the client. Ask whether you can call the client for information or incur a Lexis expense for a particular search. Make sure the partner wants you to spend time running what you think is likely to be a rabbit trail before you spend 10 hours doing it. A partner will be much less impressed by a botched assignment than a follow-up question.

Partners want to know your schedule. Your partner should always be able to reach you or know that you are going to be unreachable. Deadlines change. Clients request drafts earlier than you expect. Things happen. I once had an associate who disappeared completely for an entire weekend when a draft was due on Sunday and he hadn't

communicated with me at all about the project during the prior two weeks. Being nervous about his reliability, I called on Friday morning to make sure that he was going to meet the Sunday noon deadline. I could not reach him. I continued trying by e-mail and phone (office, home, parents) for another 24 hours before I gave up and started drafting myself. Turned out that he had "gone to the mountains" for an early weekend and was out of cell phone and BlackBerry range. He fully intended to meet the deadline but that was of little comfort after I had given up my weekend. If you are going to be unreachable, text me please before you leave!

Finally, partners want to know if you are unhappy. We invest a huge amount of money to find you, to lure you to our firms, to train you, and then to pay you those first few years when many of you do not make us any money. To lose you because you are discontented is not only frustrating on an interpersonal level, but also can be terribly uneconomical for the firm. If you are unhappy, give your partners a clue. Better yet, tell them exactly what they need to do to keep you. If they do not want to lose you, they will likely accommodate your request. ■