

068. CLIENTS SAY THE DARNDEST THINGS



We asked lawyers for their all-time favorite client questions. They answered.

BY RICK GIBSON

I SPEND A LOT OF TIME meeting with attorneys; often they refer early-stage business opportunities to me. For some time now, while they've been hard at work putting deals together, I have secretly been planning this article on funny client questions. I asked attorneys to give me their list of the 10 best questions posed to them by their clients—the most colorful questions are included here. What's the conclusion? Client questions are definitely more interesting than attorney answers.

STEPHEN R. BOATWRIGHT

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1. Do you close deals or kill deals?
2. Can we switch conference rooms? I want to make sure none of my competitors have tape recorders hidden in your conference room.
3. How can your firm minimize legal fees in my transaction?
4. Can we close this transaction this week? (Having met the client for the first time that day and not having even seen any documents or completed due diligence.)

DR. ERIC GIFFORD

(eric.gifford@cox.net) | IP attorney in high-tech and telecom, Tucson

Unusual stories surrounding the question, "Can you help me get a patent?":

1. I received a phone call from a gentleman who claimed to have invented a new car engine that never needed fuel—in essence, a perpetual motion machine—and was very excited to file a patent. He was in a fairly distant part of the state so I asked that he drive it to the office... I never heard from him again.
2. A man who claimed he was being held as a prisoner in an Oregon correctional facility told me that the guards were giving him mind-altering drugs in order to steal his invention. The guards were then getting patents and making millions of dollars on his ideas.
3. A nice gentleman who wanted a patent filed ASAP explained that he had invented an earthquake-sensing device and both the alpha and beta sensors were going off the charts, which meant with 100% certainty that California was going to have a huge earthquake and fall into the ocean. He wanted to get the patent filed before the earthquake as proof that his invention worked and had in fact predicted the "big one."

LARRY HECKER

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1. What questions should I be asking?
2. Do you have a form of full-ratchet, cliff-vesting, double-trigger, no-look warrant in your word-processing system that you can send me to mark up?
3. How do I protect my intellectual property? Is this important?
4. I would like to pay my employees and consultants partially with stock. Will there be any tax problems with this?

GLENN S. BACAL

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1. Why would I have anything in *there* (pointing to a trailer)? [Stated by a defendant just before I directed a U.S. Marshall to open the trailer pursuant to a court order—hundreds of counterfeit items literally poured out of the trailer as soon as it was opened.]
2. Look, we spent a great deal of effort copying a great privacy policy from another Web site and we've already posted it on our Web site, so why do we have to do anything else?
3. No one could possibly have obtained a patent on so simple an invention, could they have?

GABE BECKMANN

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1. I wasn't aware that esquires were around in this day and age. How many years of practice before you are appointed knight?
2. The IRS says I have to pay taxes both individually and for my corporation, this doesn't seem fair. Shouldn't I only pay taxes on income once?
3. How can I kick my wife off the board of my company?
4. Do you have a Hungarian translator available for this closing?
5. Do you have any connections with the Border Patrol? I'd like to start a "business" down there.
6. My son is looking for funding for an Internet startup. I am considering fronting the money for him—it's a sure thing, right?

LOWELL THOMAS

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Why is it that every time you send my transaction details to your tax department for review, my selling price goes down by 10%? Why don't we skip the tax review and give you a 5% bonus?

QUINN WILLIAMS

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1. Why is it so hard to find capital in Arizona?
2. How should I structure this deal to reduce taxes?
3. What do you think my business is worth?
4. Can you get me World Series tickets?
5. Why does it cost so much to go public?
6. When are you going to run for governor?

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