

On the Importance of Plants in a Law Office

by Evan Loeffler

The importance of keeping plants in one's law office cannot be overstated. I recently learned the importance of this seemingly innocuous detail when I set about the task of decorating my office.

I had decorated my office with my collection of half-empty coffee cups and a dart board on which I placed the Client of the Month. The Client of the Month was typically the one who owed me the most amount of money for the longest period of time. However, clients who had fired me (technically not clients, I know) and abusive clients made appearances as well. Usually I settled for a mere likeness of the client.

A friend pointed out the error of my ways. "Your office is disgusting!" she said. "You have nothing on the walls other than bloodstains and lots of little holes; there's no place to sit; and everything looks shabby and unkempt."

"What do you suggest?" I asked.

"You could brighten things up in here by getting some plants."

"I have plants," I protested. "Look at what I have growing in this coffee cup."

"That doesn't count."

"It took weeks to grow!"

My friend convinced me that I should give her suggestion a try. After several weeks I had to admit that plants and some paint (also her idea) made a remarkable difference.

Not all the benefits of plants in an office are obvious. Like many people, I had always assumed that plants are merely decorative and serve no useful purpose. It turns out, however, that plants in a law office provide several important services.

First, plants provide oxygen, which puts clients at ease. Lay people typically believe that lawyers are several rungs below amphibians on the evolutionary ladder and, therefore, do not require air to breathe. This can be disconcerting for clients who have to visit a lawyer's office. The existence of a plant not only indicates to the nervous client that there is enough air to breathe, but also says several things about the lawyer. Because plants are unable to water themselves, a healthy plant demonstrates that the lawyer actually cares about something. This increases the likelihood that the lawyer might care about the client's case.

Further, plants are known to feed off the vibes given off by the people around them. Some plants are known to shrivel up and die when in constant contact with angry, stressed-out people (where do you think the term "shrinking violet" came from?). Gold-plated furniture in the waiting room and a genuine Picasso on the wall may indicate that the firm had a good year once upon a time, but a healthy plant means that the firm is doing well right now.

Plants are also subtle. Pets could be used to accomplish any of the above functions, but pets present problems that outweigh any possible utility. For example, a canary could be used to indicate the lack of oxygen in the workplace as in the coal mines of old. Canaries, however, do several things which plants do not which makes their presence in a law firm undesirable. First canaries eat every day while plants only need watering once or twice a week. Second, canaries poop. Constantly. This requires daily cleaning and relining of their cages (I suggest the *Bar News*) while plants only require a pot to sit in. Third, canaries make noise when they are not adequately cared for while plants die quietly. Finally, and most importantly, canaries can learn to speak which could be disastrous. Imagine the confidence instilled in a prospective client when he hears your canary shrieking about missed filing deadlines and malpractice coverage. Plants are silent observers of any goings-on in the office.

In picking an office plant one must exercise some discretion and restraint. Avoid Venus flytraps and other carnivorous shrubbery unless being eaten by a plant is specifically covered in your premises liability insurance. Similarly, avoid poisonous and illegal plants unless you can prove you are holding them as evidence for an upcoming trial. While they are pretty, a lawyer should shun daisies, pansies, and other "sissy" plants lest he or she convey the wrong image to the client.

Some plants can be quite useful. I myself have a coffee plant which, I hope, will one day grow enough to supply me with a free supply. A fruit tree could be used to supply lunch to the practitioner on the go. This can be taken to extremes, however, which should be avoided. Growing a cedar in with the plan of harvesting it for pencils is probably unworkable and would also leave a large stump in the office. Environmental lawyers should resist the temptation to move a small forest into their offices in the hopes of giving spotted owls a place to nest. Loggers would find a way in there sooner or later, and owls present most of the same problems as canaries.

Finally, do not make the mistake I made of attempting to pass off mold as a plant. First, mold is not commonly associated with prosperity or beauty. Second, I have found that to do so this is one of the many unspeakably stupid "bachelor guy" things I have done that takes forever to live down.