EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION
AT TOBLER & ASSOCIATES:
AN AUDIENCE ANALYSIS SURVEY

A Capstone Project submitted to Southern Utah University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication

May 2013

By

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Acknowledgements

As I conclude my graduate program at Southern Utah University I am filled with gratitude. It has truly been an extraordinary experience from which I have learned a lot, and I very much appreciate all those who have helped me along the way. I know that I could not have achieved this accomplishment without their support.

First and foremost, I would like to thank with the deepest of gratitude my loving husband, Max. His patience with me over the past two years has been nothing short of remarkable and he always gave me the confidence and reassurance I needed to continue my education when I felt it was too much for me to handle. Max truly brings out the best in me and helps me achieve my greatest potential. For that, I will forever be grateful.

Additionally, I would like to thank my parents, Chris and Roberta Robertozzi, sister, Sarah Bastian, and brother, Christian Robertozzi for their constant love and support. I am especially appreciative to my parents for instilling in me the importance of an education throughout my life. I also thank my sister and brother who have been successful in both their academic and professional careers and consequently, have set the bar high for me.

Further, I would like to thank the incredible faculty at Southern Utah University (SUU). Specifically, I would like to thank my capstone committee Dr. Barton, Dr. Husselbee, and Dr. Stein. Dr. Barton was the original reason that I chose to attend Southern Utah University. He took the time to educate me about the school and the program and due to my unusual circumstances, made the entire program available to me remotely. I would also like to thank Dr. Husselbee who has been an extraordinary professor and mentor. I have been fortunate enough to learn from him throughout my entire time at SUU. Dr. Husselbee's dedication to his students is evident in his lessons as they are always engaging and thought-provoking. Lastly, I would like to

thank Dr. Stein, whose insights and encouragement have helped me aim higher. I have learned a tremendous amount from Dr. Stein throughout both his lectures and his participation on my capstone committee. These three professors have made my education an exceptional experience.

It is through these individuals that my educational experience over the past two years has far exceeded that which was strictly learned academically. Patience, support, and reassurance have all played a large role in where I am today. I hope in the future, I will have the opportunity to pay forward the generosity in both time and effort that others have shown to me throughout the course of this program.

Abstract

Effective Communication at Tobler & Associates: An Audience Analysis Survey

Lindsay R. Booker

An assessment of client communication was conducted for a law firm, Tobler & Associates, in Phoenix, Arizona. The assessment was comprised of two surveys, one that was completed by current and former clients of the firm and the other that was completed by the firm's staff. The results of these surveys were analyzed in order to better understand customer satisfaction as it relates to frequency of communication, timeliness of response, communication channels, information sharing, perceived competence and professionalism, expectations and case outcomes. Recommendations are formed and provided to the firm based on the analysis. Additionally, the results are compared to expected findings based on the Hyperpersonal Model which is discussed in detail through a literature review.

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Introduction

As a Masters student in Professional Communication, I have felt it important to apply the skills and knowledge that I have obtained throughout my degree in a professional capacity. Based on a class taken during the course of my studies, Contemporary Audiences Seminar (Comm 6220), I chose to complete a capstone project in which I would conduct an audience analysis for Tobler & Associates, a law firm in Phoenix, Arizona, with the intent of evaluating the efficiency of the firm's current communication methods with its clients. More specifically, I have assessed client communication as it relates to client satisfaction, confidence in firm and staff abilities, and the degree that miscommunication is minimized. The research questions used to assess this information are, "How effective is the communication at Tobler & Associates as it relates to client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication?" and "To what extent, if any, does computer-mediated communication have a positive or negative impact on client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication?"

This project has not only been a positive educational experience for me, as I have been able to apply things I have learned in a "real-world" context, but it will also benefit Tobler & Associates as I provide the firm with all of my findings, including strengths, weaknesses, and best practices. I have also provided recommendations for improvement based on these findings in which I have drawn on both my analysis of the assessment as well as prior work experience in various law firms.

Additionally, I have sought to apply communication theory in my analysis of the communication between the firm and its clients. I evaluated the contrast of verbal and electronic communication as it relates to the Hyperpersonal Model of interpersonal communication, comparing client's feelings toward face-to-face (FtF) communication and computer-mediated communication (CMC) to see which elicits more customer satisfaction, creates fewer instances of miscommunication and better creates a positive perception of Tobler & Associates.

The Hyperpersonal model states that relationships formed through CMC have the potential to be superior to those of parallel FtF relationships (Walther, 1996). CMC can be both inefficient and highly efficient. According to the model, it becomes hyperpersonal when the sender has the ability to carefully craft a message and control the recipient's perception of both the sender and the message. Thus, forms of communication used by Tobler & Associates, such as email, have the potential to exceed FtF interpersonal communication by means of perception, satisfaction, and avoidance of miscommunication. I analyzed my findings related to the firm's use of CMC against the Hyperpersonal Model and provided appropriate feedback to the firm.

Literature Review of the Hyperpersonal Model

Prior to introducing the Hyperpersonal Model in 1996, Joseph Walther investigated the effects of computer-mediated communication (CMC) from research that was already present. His findings were mixed. Some researchers believed that communication in business must be rich, as problems are complex (Daft & Lengel, 1984). This led to an initial assumption that CMC would not be good for task-related communication (Walther, 1996). Other researchers suggested that CMC was not good for interpersonal exchanges because of "scant social information" (Walther, 1996, p. 4). However, at this time Internet, email, online communities and online dating were all increasing in adoption. Walther (1996) also discovered reports that claimed that CMC could be just as personal as face-to-face (FtF) interactions. This opportunity for further research eventually led him to develop the Hyperpersonal Model.

Questioning whether CMC had the potential for providing just as effective interactions as FtF communication, researchers looked closer at the social implications of computer-mediated communication. At the time, they found CMC to be a more depersonalized form of communication (Garton & Wellman, 1993). Thus, in certain circumstances where less social information is required, and task-orientation is preferential, CMC was found to be very advantageous (Dubrovsky, 1995). In fact, Smolensky, Carmody and Halcomb (1990) empirically found that CMC results in better decision-making due to less extraneous conversation.

Researchers also looked at impression development in both CMC participants and face-to-face participants. It was found that interpersonal impressions of CMC communicators' would initially be less developed that FtF participants, but that they would gradually come to equal those of FtF communicators (Walther, 1993). In terms of relational development, Walther and Burgoon (1992) found very few differences between the FtF and CMC conditions and found that CMC participants also use cues to help manage relational development. All of this research would lead one to believe that CMC is not inherently impersonal.

It can, however, be made to be impersonal when advantageous. Many researchers have looked into Group Decision Support Systems (GDSS). Jessup, Connolly and Galegher (1990) found that anonymity of GDSS allows people to speak more freely and criticize more openly. This criticism is actually a good thing because it is not personal and it leads to better decision-making (Valacich, Dennis & Nunamaker, 1992). They also found that a group involved in a discussion can create more comments in less time in CMC than could be achieved in FtF meetings (Valacich et al., 1992). The major problem, however, is that CMC groups take much more time to come to a decision and/or a consensus, compared to FtF groups (Hiltz, Johnson & Turoff, 1986). In regards to impersonal interaction, the findings were mixed.

However, there are various examples in which CMC is much more personal than FtF in terms of affection and emotion. This has been seen to take place in online chat rooms, bulletin boards and computer games (Reid, 1991). Walther (1995) found that when outsiders assessed the relational communication between CMC and FtF groups, they rated CMC higher in categories of both intimacy and social orientation. Accordingly, Walther (1996) surmised that CMC could be more interpersonal and more desirable, surpassing parallel FtF interactions and becoming hyperpersonal. The Hyperpersonal Model, developed by Walther, can be broken down into four elements: receivers, senders, characteristics of the channel, and feedback. To better understand the model, I will review each element individually.

The first element to analyze is the receiver, which according to Walther (1996) experiences an “idealized perception” (p.17) of the sender. Because of a lack of cues that are normally found in FtF interactions, receivers of CMC rely on alternative cues such as “misspellings, typographical errors, or excessive punctuation” (Walther, 1996, p.18). Due to a lack of physical cues, receivers become over reliant on the few cues that they have and form impressions of the senders based on them (Lea & Spears, 1992). This idealized perception of the sender can lead to influence due to the established hyperpersonal relationship. In one test to see if more charitable contributions could be attained through CMC than traditional FtF methods, donation requests were sent out through both channels. Interestingly, email had twice the affirmative response than that of FtF (Chan, 2010). It is speculated that this is due to the fact that the receiver has an elevated perception of the sender due to the opportunity to carefully craft his/her message.

Another characteristic of receivers in CMC is the ability to use self-categorization to find similarities with their partners (Walther, 1996). This would be the case if someone were part of a group that was corresponding online. For example, online social groups that gather based on concepts of expertise, ideation or trauma share common experiences and often result in hyperpersonal interactions (Jones, 1995).

The second element is the sender, which benefits from an “optimized self-presentation” (Walther, 1996, p.19). Another reason that Walther believes CMC can become hyperpersonal is because the sender is able to carefully manage the impression that the receiver forms of him/her. This is in part due to the lack of physical cues. Since no one can prejudge another due to the way they look, the relationship must be based on the information shared, which can be much more personal (Suler, 2004). Also, because of the channel characteristics, which will be discussed later, CMC allows the sender to take time to craft a message, revise it as needed, and take measures that will lead the receiver to form the desired impression (Walther, 1996). This is known as impression management, and will be discussed further as a key component of the Hyperpersonal Model.

The third element is the communication channel. The channel in which communication is occurring can have a significant impact. There are two broad channels used in any form of communication, synchronous and asynchronous. A synchronous form of communication entails partners to be actively engaged in the conversation at the same time. FtF communications uses this type of channel. This requires that both the sender and receiver are able to communicate at the same time, which can sometimes be problematic. It also may require both parties to think and respond quickly to each other’s comments.

Asynchronous communication, however, provides a way for participants to communicate with each other when it is convenient for them, as it does not involve simultaneous attention. In this respect, CMC is preferable to that of FtF for accomplishing specific tasks. Smolensky (1990) states that, “people simply don’t accomplish as much work on a task when they are generating extraneous conversation" (p. 269). However, from a Hyperpersonal point of view, the principal advantage to the asynchronous channel is that there is an opportunity to be more mindful and careful of one's comments (Walther, 1996). The asynchronous communication allows the sender to have greater control of the interaction (Trevino & Webster, 1992). For example, as you write and edit an email you might carefully craft each sentence to make sure that it conveys exactly what you want and how you want it. Thus it allows for the optimized self-presentation previously referred to in this literature review.

The final element of the Hyperpersonal Model is feedback, which plays an important role in any form of interpersonal communication. In traditional FtF communication, the sender receives both verbal and nonverbal feedback, the latter being in the form of cues such as body language or facial expression. Also in FtF, behavioral confirmation occurs, in which the sender behaves based on the expectations of the receiver (Darley & Fazio, 1980). A classic example by Snyder, Tanke and Berscheid (1977) showed that via telephone, women who were speaking to men with preconceived notions of their attractiveness began to act the way that they were perceived because of how men spoke to them. Walther (1996) not only found that behavioral confirmation occurs in CMC as well, but also found that it is magnified as a result of the minimal-cue interaction. As previously mentioned, it is due to minimal cues that the receiver forms an idealized perception of the sender. With each message, the sender seeks to meet the expectations of the receiver, which leads to an increasingly idealized perception of the other. Walther (1996) refers to this as an "intensification loop" and yet another example of how CMC can become hyperpersonal (p.27).

Feedback can also be a contributor to identity shift. Research has found that when the receiver provides feedback to the sender regarding specific personality attributes that he/she perceives the sender to have, that the sender is more likely to have an identity shift. This means that he/she will modify his/her next self-presentation to exhibit this attribute, creating a persona that becomes closer to who the receiver believes him/her to be (Walther, DeAndrea, Tong, Carr, Sppottswood, & Amichai-Hamburger, 2011). Another study showed that identity shift occurs to a greater degree in CMC than FtF during extroverted self-presentations (Gonzales & Hancock, 2009).

As is evident, impression management, which can possibly be better achieved via CMC, is at the heart of the hyperpersonal model. This model predicts the following impression management elements: The *sender* will be able to project an image by carefully crafting a message due to the *asynchronous channel*. The *receiver* will experience an idealized view of the sender, and the *feedback* process will reinforce the perceptions that each participant has of the other due to behavior confirmation with minimalistic cues.

Because of the role of self-presentation in CMC, it is important to understand more about the concept. A well-known sociologist of the 20^{th} century, Erving Goffman (1959), felt that the presentation of self, regardless of the situation, is rooted in motives of delivering a specific impression (p.15). He uses a theatrical metaphor to explain the presentation of self, stating that typical, everyday settings are considered the stage and that the people are the actors who use their various performances to make an impression for the audience (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) also discusses face engagements, which are focused interactions between people. This is particularly relevant to focused computer-mediated communication such as email or instant messaging. When people take part in face engagements, they take turns "presenting dramas to one another" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 87). Through these dramas, we are presenting a specific type of self. If the receiver accepts the framed communication as the sender provides it, then the receiver is accepting that characterization of the sender. It is Goffman's belief that these dramatizations are what determine the self (Goffman, 1959). Therefore in CMC, if one wishes to be characterized as confident by the receiver, one must take actions to frame an electronic message that conveys confidence.

Self-presentation differs per circumstance. One will adapt his/her actions to achieve a specific presentation of self, depending on who the audience is and the situation (Goffman, 1959). In CMC, this would equate to presenting one's self differently per message depending on the recipient or purpose. However, according to Goffman (1995), one would not only provide information, but also receive information about the surrounding people and situation. This would allow people to better gage what is expected of them and alter their behavior to elicit a certain impression, thus "self-presentation is very much a matter of impression management" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 88).

Walther (1996) believes that the self-presentation becomes easier via computer-mediated communication, and thus impression management in CMC is superior to that of FtF interactions. For example, through research, he found that CMC senders took the opportunity to better plan and self-sensor, creating a chance for more reflection and self-awareness (Walther, 1996). Conversely, in FtF interactions one acts spontaneously, making it more difficult to manage impressions (Hiemstra, 1982). Additionally, because of the nature of FtF encounters, forming an impression is developed not only from the message itself, but also by making judgments about the sender based on how he talks, how he presents himself, how he makes eye contact, etc. Because one cannot use these cognitive shortcuts in CMC, it has been found that a stronger impression can be formed via CMC even given less detail in the message, when it is carefully crafted to control perceptions (Hancock & Dunham, 2001).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of impression management as detailed by the Hyperpersonal Model has been questioned. Contrary to Walther's predictions and findings, Okdie, Guadagno, Bernieri, Geers, and Mclarney-Vesotski (2011) found that while interacting, FtF participants reported more positive impressions of their partners than participants interacting via CMC because they could more accurately perceive the other person. Another study indicated that the same message transmitted over email rather than voice elicited "greater racial stereotypes and bogus expectancies" (Epley & Krueger, 2005, p. 414).

However, the vast majority of the research supports the high level of impression management achieved through CMC and the resulting hyperpersonal model. For example, although CMC provides minimal cue interaction, there are still many cues that help form impressions, many of which come as a form of feedback. One study tested image formation in CMC through the use of paralinguistic cues by inserting these cues into an email message. By inserting specific cues such as punctuation marks and spelling errors, strong impressions were formed of the message senders (Lea & Spears, 1992). Additionally, even though there are not traditional nonverbal cues in CMC as there are in FtF interpersonal communication, there is a type of nonverbal cue, which is response time. A significant delay in email response times greatly impacts perceptions of the communicators' intimacy, submissiveness, liking or dominance (Walther & Tidwell, 1995).

Not everyone eagerly uses CMC to tailor his or her self-presentation. High and Caplan (2008) analyzed the effects of social anxiety on CMC and impression management. They found that more socially anxious individuals, who care what the receiver thinks about them, are more likely to employ selective self-presentation via CMC than people who are less socially anxious. Moreover, the receiver accurately perceives them as less anxious. Self-awareness has also been evaluated to see how it affects CMC. A study by Yao & Flanagin (2006) concluded that even some individuals with little private or public self-awareness are still able to use self-presentation to positively manage others' impressions in anonymous CMC interactions.

Also consistent with the hyperpersonal model, Duther (2006) demonstrated that users of CMC, and more specifically, email, were more polite with requests than were voicemail users. Duthler found this by analyzing the properties of politeness from requests via voicemail and email of 151 participants. Researchers concluded that through the use of CMC, users had a greater ability to plan, compose, and edit the email communication, thus creating a more carefully considered message than that over voicemail (Duthler, 2006).

Online (Internet) presences, in particular, can allow for self-presentation to change our identities. Gonzales and Hancock showed that by making one's identity available on a public blog, one can create a new self-concept based on that self-presentation (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). This new self-presentation may stay with a person even when he or she is not actively engaged in CMC.

As previously mentioned, feedback in CMC can lead to intensified behavioral confirmation. Recently, this has been studied within CMC as identity shift. Research has found that when the receiver provides feedback to the sender regarding specific personality attributes that he/she perceives the sender to have, that the sender is more likely to have an identity shift. This means that he/she will modify his/her next self-presentation to exhibit this attribute, creating a persona that becomes closer to who the receiver believes him/her to be (Walther, DeAndrea, Tong, Carr, Sppottswood, & Amichai-Hamburger, 2011). Another study showed that identity shift occurs to a greater degree in CMC than FtF during extroverted self-presentations (Gonzales & Hancock, 2009).

Computer-mediated communication's impression management abilities have led many to study its effect on relationships. CMC has unique interpersonal and even intrapersonal effects. For example, a person may elicit disliking or liking from a conversational partner during a CMC encounter by using positive or negative statements about his/her partners' opinions (Walther, Van Der Heide, Tong, Carr, & Atkin, 2010). Although this also holds true for verbal interpersonal communication, CMC makes it much easier to craft the targeted message, often looking up things with which one might be unfamiliar. Additionally, "communicators' relational goals [come] to affect their own attitudes about the conversational topic" (Walther et al., 2010, p. 338).

Kelsey and Lancaster (2011) investigated the impact of frequency in CMC exchanges as it relates to relationships. They did this by analyzing emails between teachers and their students at a university level. Findings demonstrated that an increase in frequency of email contact had a positive impact on the student-teacher relationship (Kelsey & Lancaster, 2011). However, these emails did not need to be exclusive, one-on-one emails between the teacher and the student. Mass emails were completely suitable and at times, even preferred. The increasingly positive relationship formed by frequent email communication improved student retention and academic success (Kelsey & Lancaster, 2011).

Due to a lack of research regarding effective online communication at the time, Walther, Loh, and Granka (2005) conducted a study to measure the difference in affinity of face-to-face and CMC interaction. They assessed the verbal effect of FtF and CMC dyads by giving each group one of two scenarios to discuss. They concluded that the two forms of communication were virtually equivalent in regard to effective communication.

However, support for the Hyperpersonal Model is evident in the growth of relational intimacy achieved through CMC versus FtF interaction. In a study conducted over the course of three consecutive days, participants were placed in groups of two, and subject to either a CMC or an FtF condition. Results showed that there was an increase in relational intimacy between those subject to the CMC condition, but not the FtF condition (Lee, Sim, & Detenber, 2003). This provides additional evidence of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model, indicating that interpersonal relationships can develop further than they would in an equivalent face-to-face interaction in the same amount of time.

Another element of intimate relationships is that of self-disclosure. Three studies performed by Joinson (2001) demonstrated the role that CMC plays in self-disclosure. These studies showed that: 1) there was an increase of self-disclosure in CMC versus FtF discussions, 2) subjects disclosed significantly more details about themselves when they were visually anonymous versus when they were not, and 3) high private self-awareness coupled with low public self-awareness leads to a significantly higher level of unprompted self-disclosure (Joinson, 2001). Another study found that CMC interactions demonstrated a more profound relationship between intimacy and disclosure than FtF interactions (Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011).

In summary, the Hyperpersonal Model has been described as being “CMC that is more socially desirable than we tend to experience in parallel FtF interaction” (Walther, 1996, p. 17). Analysis of the elements of CMC, including the sender, the receiver, the channel, and the feedback, as well as Goffman’s theories of self-presentation, indicate a strong argument for enhanced impression management abilities.

As people increasingly move to online use and businesses further adopt forms of computer-mediated communication, it is imperative to understand how to attain maximum value out of this communication. Given that much of the research indicates that CMC can become hyperpersonal, a great opportunity exists for professional service firms in which building a positive relationship with clientele is critical to success. For law firms in particular, impression management is key. Attorneys, paralegals, legal assistants, etc. need to portray a significant degree of professionalism and confidence in order to convey competence and trustworthiness to their clients. Furthermore, as CMC has been shown to be more efficient in a task-orientation sense, firms can find increased productivity through the asynchronous channel by avoiding extraneous conversation.

A good understanding of the Hyperpersonal Model as described by Walther is very important. As indicated, there are four elements that provide this opportunity within CMC: the sender, the receiver, the channel, and the feedback. Within a law firm, employees must be aware that their ability to influence a receiver's perception requires careful and thoughtful message creation. Employees must also be given adequate time to do so whenever possible. Although the staff at a law firm is exceptionally busy, there must be balance between responding to the clients in a timely manner, and also taking the time necessary to carefully craft their messages. They might also understand that through the intensification loop of feedback, the receiver will act in the way that the sender treats him/her, thus providing the firm's staff an opportunity to further control a situation. If utilized correctly, clients should feel not only satisfied with the firm, but also that they are competent in their work.

Additional CMC research previously referred to also provides incredible insights. For example, since CMC used by law firms is one-on-one, the negative aspect of not being able to make decisions or reach consensus can be avoided. Socially anxious clients will feel more comfortable expressing themselves or situations via email than in person. Both CMC parties will possibly be seen as more polite. And because of an understanding of minimal cues in CMC, the firm can see increased value in the timely responses of emails as this cue becomes increasingly important.

An understanding of this aggregation of research on CMC and the Hyperpersonal Model will likely prove to be instrumental in (1) assessing the current state of Tobler & Associates' client communication, and (2) provide ideas to modify their communication strategies to improve the firm's image.

Rationale and Research Questions

For six years, I worked as a receptionist, legal assistant, and paralegal at three law firms in two states. My responsibilities included answering the phones, screening clients, marketing services to potential clients, and managing and organizing up to 100 client legal cases simultaneously through settlement or litigation. In every aspect of my job, I had to communicate effectively with clients, insurance adjusters, health care professionals and the firm's lawyers. All three law firms differed in various ways from marketing tactics to office protocols. However, one variable remained constant. Regardless of the firm, the most imperative tool of success was that of effective communication.

I believe that each law firm understands the importance of communication and expresses that in its own way. Tobler & Associates is a family-run law firm that always focuses on the needs of clients and specializes in personal injury. However, clients often have separate legal issues such as bankruptcy, divorce, or estate issues in which they would request the assistance of the attorneys. These attorneys always take the time to address the concerns of their clients, regardless of the issue. Tobler & Associates consistently focuses on quality, not quantity, to ensure the best results for its clients and create a positive image.

The second law firm I worked for performed quarterly employee reviews, which included metrics and assessments regarding client contact. The owners wanted to ensure that paralegals were in contact with their clients at least once a month to keep the lines of communication open and keep clients informed. The third law firm that I worked for always reminded us of the importance of understanding and then meeting our clients' needs. It was imperative to the attorney to keep clients informed so that they would know that we were working on in their cases at all times.

All three of these firms value effective communication, especially with their clients. However, because I am still in close contact with one of Tobler & Associates' attorneys, I offered to complete an audience analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of its current client communication to help the partners better understand the firm's strengths and weaknesses in this area.

I believe that effective communication is imperative to the success of any business. Having the ability to effectively articulate messages to different audiences with various levels of understanding, and have the message received in the manner that you want it received (self-presentation) is a valuable skill. More specifically, effective communication will result in greater client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication at Tobler & Associates. According to Dubrovsky (1995), CMC is considered to be more advantageous for more task-oriented circumstances. For this reason, I believe effective communication through CMC will lead to increased productivity and personal referrals in addition to better settlements. Furthermore, based on the applicable theory of the Hyperpersonal Model, it is also important to address the potential impact that computer-mediated communication may have on client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication. By better understanding the role that CMC, or more specifically email, plays in the communication at the firm, the employees will know how to best utilize it. Additional research would need to be completed in order to truly understand the effectiveness of computer-mediated-communication in an office setting. The foregoing literature review and rationale suggest two research questions:

RQ1: How effective is the communication at Tobler & Associates as it relates to client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication?

RQ2: To what extent, if any, does computer-mediated communication have a positive or negative impact on client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication?

Method

To conduct this audience analysis, I decided that the most feasible assessment tool would be that of an online survey, given the geographical distance and distribution of the firm's clients as well as cost limitations. A survey was administered not only to the clients of Tobler & Associates, but a survey was also created for the firm's employees, which paralleled the client survey questions. The project objectives were accomplished through a systematic approach. Step by step, the survey was created, distributed, and completed. Although there were a few impediments during the process, at the conclusion of the survey, I completed a thorough analysis of the results and offer recommendations to the firm.

Step 1: Foundation for Project

During my second semester of the program, I was fortunate enough to enroll in a course titled Contemporary Audiences Seminar, taught by Dr. Paul Husselbee. This course taught me how to analyze various audiences through the use of polls, surveys and focus groups. I wanted to apply the education I received in that class to my capstone project in a manner that would benefit a law firm that I previously worked for in Arizona, Tobler & Associates. After reviewing my idea with Dr. Husselbee and Dr. Barton to receive tentative approval, I contacted a partner at the firm, Maren Hanson. I explained my desire to assist the firm in a form of an audience analysis. After reviewing a few different options, we decided that a survey regarding the efficiency of the firm's client communication would be most beneficial to the partners.

Step 2: Research

After receiving the approval of Maren and my capstone committee chairs, Dr. Barton and Dr. Husselbee, I extensively researched communication theories and models that would be applicable to my project. Ultimately, I decided that the Hyperpersonal Model of interpersonal communication had the potential to be very beneficial as the research concerning computer-mediated communication would be highly applicable to a professional services firm. To better understand the Hyperpersonal Model, I conducted an in-depth literature review on the subject.

Step 3: Survey Creation

Once I had completed the appropriate research, I created the survey. The questions I created were based both on the agreed upon project objectives and the hyperpersonal model. I created questions regarding:

- Frequency – I wanted to know how frequently the staff was in contact with firm clients and if they were satisfied with that level of frequency.
- Timeliness – Questions were aimed at better understanding how quickly staff responded to the clients and if the clients were content with it.

- Communication Channels – I asked about the methods they used to initiate conversation, which method was used the most, and which channel was preferred by clients.
- Information Sharing – Questions were created in order to determine if clients were satisfied with the degree of information they were being given. Furthermore, I addressed the issue of miscommunication, if it ever happened, and in what form it occurred.
- Perceived Competency and Professionalism– Since self-presentation is a significant part of the Hyperpersonal Model, questions were devised to understand how satisfied clients were with the staff's abilities, and how they were able to best and least demonstrate their capabilities and professionalism.
- Expectations and satisfaction – Questions were created that asked clients how well the firm communicated expectations, and how satisfied they were with the communication in general.
- Feelings toward resolution – Seeking to better understand if good client communication leads to better outcomes, I also asked about their general feelings about the settlement or resolution of the case.

After covering these topics, I also asked which staff member worked on the subject's case and concluded the questionnaire with demographic questions. As mentioned, a survey for employees was also created following the same topic structure. Each question was evaluated following best practices for survey question creation as per Poidexter and McCombs (2000). For a full copy of the client survey, please see Appendix A. For a full copy of the employee survey, please see Appendix B.

Step 4: Approval

After I finished creating the survey, I submitted it to Dr. Husselbee and Maren Tobler for feedback and approval. After various revisions, I created the survey in the online surveying tool, Qualtrics. I then began the process of attaining IRB approval for the participation of the study's subjects, working closely with Dr. Husselbee to complete necessary paperwork. With IRB approval for both the client and employee surveys finalized, I was ready to administer the survey.

Step 5: Administration of Survey

I first worked with personnel of Tobler & Associates to attain email addresses for former and current clients. Unfortunately, they did not have as many email addresses as we had originally anticipated, but still provided 103 viable email addresses. At the time, I thought this number might allow me to achieve my target of 50 responses for a final analysis.

Utilizing the mass mail functionality of Qualtrics, I uploaded the email addresses to the system, and sent out personalized emails to each of the potential participants. As an incentive for participation, I instituted a random drawing for a $50 gift card that all participants who completed the survey would be entered into. To see the invitation email, see Appendix C.

With the monetary incentive as well as the familiarity that clients have with the firm, I believed that I would be able to achieve a satisfactory response rate. Unfortunately, I was wrong, and only received 10 completed surveys within the first two weeks of distributing the survey. Because of the low response rate, I sent out two rounds of reminder emails only to clients who had not yet completed the survey. To see a sample reminder email, see Appendix D. This resulted in another 12 completed surveys, totaling 22. At this point, I realized I would not get the response necessary for a proper analysis.

Step 6: Re-strategize

Once I realized that I was not going to get the response I needed, I knew I would need to re-strategize. Originally, I thought calling the clients to complete the survey via telephone would yield the greatest results. However, after reviewing this idea with Maren, she felt this strategy would be too invasive. Consequently, I then proposed sending postcards with the survey URL to former and current clients for whom the firm did not have email addresses. I discussed the problem with Dr. Husselbee, and he agreed that I should mail out the postcards. Maren Tobler agreed that a link to the survey should be sent out via mail, and kindly provided the mailing addresses.

From that list, I randomly chose 500 names from a list of more than 2,000 clients. I created a custom postcard utilizing the online service, Vistaprint, and included both a shortened URL to the survey as well as a QR code link for survey completion on mobile devices. I also advertised the VISA gift card. Vistaprint allowed me to upload the addresses that Maren had provided, instead of manually addressing each postcard, and once the appropriate information was uploaded, I had the postcards printed and mailed. To see the postcard, see Appendix E. Of these 500 postcard invitations, only 8 additional responses were received.

Step 7: Final Analysis

After inviting 603 clients to participate and collecting survey responses for about 2 months, a total of 30 responses were attained, achieving a response rate of 4.98%. I closed the survey despite the low responses to complete the planned analysis. All of the question's findings were analyzed in the section to which they belonged. This included client and firm responses. I then interpreted the findings and provided recommendations for Tobler & Associates.

Results

It is important to note that ideally a pilot study should be conducted first. Unfortunately, however, I did not have the means to do so because of a lack of both time and willing participants.

Results: Frequency

The objective for the first three questions of the survey was to determine how frequently the clients were in contact with Tobler & Associates and if they were satisfied with that frequency. The first question asked about the number of communications the clients remember having with Tobler & Associates on a per month basis. Table 1 (below) shows that half of the respondents felt that they were in contact with the firm more than once a month and 20% were in touch once a month. Some 30% were in contact with the firm less than once a month.

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Client Frequency of Contact with Tobler & Associates

Question: On average how frequently were you in contact with Tobler & Associates while the firm was working on your case?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
More than once a month	15	50.0	50.0
Once a month	6	20.0	70.0
Once every other month	4	13.3	83.3
Once every three months	0	0.0	83.3
Less than once every three months	5	16.7	100.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**	

Not surprisingly, in Table 2 (below) we see that 70% of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the frequency of communication that occurred between them and the firm while only 13% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. A cross tabulation between frequency and satisfaction shows that in general, those clients that are in contact with Tobler & Associates more often are more satisfied. Some 17% felt neutral about the frequency of communication.

Table 2
Frequency Distribution of Client Satisfaction Related to Frequency of Contact

Question: How satisfied were you with the frequency of communication that occurred between you and Tobler & Associates?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Very Dissatisfied	3	10.0	10.0
Dissatisfied	1	3.3	13.3
Neutral	5	16.7	30.0
Satisfied	10	33.3	63.3
Very Satisfied	11	36.7	100.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**	

Of the respondents that were dissatisfied with frequency that Tobler & Associates were in contact with them, Table 3 (p. 29) shows that 75% would have preferred to be in contact more than once a month and the other 25% felt they would have preferred to be in touch once a month. The findings from this portion of the survey would suggest that for the most part, the more frequently the firm was in contact with the clients, the greater the level of satisfaction.

Table 3
Frequency Distribution of Client Preference of Frequency of Contact

Question: Please tell us how frequently you would have preferred to be in contact with Tobler & Associates. (Question displays if client indicated dissatisfaction of frequency.)

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
More than once a month	3	75.0	75.0
Once a month	1	25.0	100.0
Once every other month	0	0.0	100.0
Once every three months	0	0.0	100.0
Less than once every three months	0	0.0	100.0
Total	**4**	**100.0**	

The staff of Tobler & Associates answered a similar question about contact frequency. In Table 4 (below), we see that 75% of the staff believe they should be in contact with their active clients once a month, leaving only one staff member feeling that they should be in contact more than once a month and one staff member feeling they should be contact once every other month.

Table 4
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perceived Ideal Frequency of Contact with Clients

Question: Please describe on average how frequently you believe you should be in contact with your active clients.

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
More than once a month	1	12.5	12.5
Once a month	6	75.0	87.5
Once every other month	1	12.5	100.0
Once every three months	0	0.0	100.0
Less than once every three months	0	0.0	100.0
Total	**8**	**100.0**	

Interestingly enough, however, staff members varied in how frequently they actually are in contact with their clients as demonstrated in Table 5 (below). Twenty-five percent are in contact more than once a month, 25% are in touch once a month, and 25% are in contact once every other month. This left one employee to be in touch once every three months and one employee to be touch less than once every three months. This would indicate that although most staff members feel that it was most appropriate to contact the clients once a month, they are not following through with that action. This could be due to a lack of time or feelings that there is nothing to report.

Table 5
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Frequency of Contact with Clients
Question: Please describe on average how frequently you are in contact with your clients.

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
More than once a month	2	25.0	25.0
Once a month	2	25.0	50.0
Once every other month	2	25.0	75.0
Once every three months	1	12.5	87.5
Less than once every three months	1	12.5	100.0
Total	**8**	**100.0**	

As indicated above, the client's preference regarding contact frequency is different than what the staff believes to be most appropriate, and also different than what the staff is currently doing. Most of the clients would prefer to be contacted regarding their case more than once per month, however there is a general trend among employees that once per month is ideal.

Although most clients would prefer to be in contact more than once a month, it may simply not be feasible to spend this much time contacting clients, especially if there is nothing to report. However, contacting the clients once a month would be far more manageable and likely keep the clients more satisfied given the relationship between frequency of communication and satisfaction.

Results: Timeliness

Similar to the frequency section, the intention of the next section was to measure the timeliness of staff/client interaction as well as the resulting client satisfaction. First, in Table six (below), clients were asked how soon the staff got back to them when they either requested information or to be contacted by the firm. The majority of participants reported being contacted fairly quickly, with nearly half (47%) saying that they were contacted within 24 hours. Forty percent said they were contacted between one and two days. Fewer clients reported a longer time period for the firm to contact them, however a higher than anticipated (10%) said that it took longer than seven days for a response from the firm.

Table 6
Frequency Distribution of Client's Perception of Tobler & Associates' Response Time

Question: When you requested information or to be contacted by Tobler & Associates, how soon did they typically get back to you?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Within 24 hours	14	46.7	46.7
Between 1 and 2 days	12	40.0	86.7
Between 3 and 7 days	1	3.3	90.0
Longer than 7 days	3	10.0	100.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**	

These numbers very closely correlate to the level of satisfaction that the respondents had in the firm's timeliness as Table 7 (p. 32) shows that10% were very dissatisfied, 7% were dissatisfied, 7% felt neutral, 40% were satisfied, and 37% were very satisfied. A cross-tabulation shows that a relationship between timeliness and satisfaction may exist. Using Kendall’s Tau non-parametric calculation, a correlation of 0.6 is found between timeliness and satisfaction, and is statistically significant with an alpha of 0.01. Although it is not particularly strong, we do see that there is some correlation. Satisfaction appears to be fairly high when the clients are contacted within 48 hours of a request.

Table 7
Frequency Distribution of Client Satisfaction of Tobler & Associates’ Response Time
Question: How satisfied were you with the timeliness of Tobler & Associates' responses to your phone calls, emails, or letters?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Very Dissatisfied	3	10.0	10.0
Dissatisfied	2	6.7	16.7
Neutral	2	6.7	23.4
Satisfied	12	40.0	63.4
Very Satisfied	11	36.7	100.0
Total	**30**	**100.0**	

The third and fourth employee questions ask how soon the staff contacts clients upon request. Table eight (p. 33) shows that 44% feel that they get back to their clients within 24 hours, 44% within a one to two day time frame, and only one person took three to seven days to get back to them.

Table 8
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perception of His/Her Response Time to Clients
Question: When clients request either information or to be contacted by you, how soon do you typically get back to them?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Within 24 hours	4	44.4	44.4
Between 1 and 2 days	4	44.4	88.8
Between 3 and 7 days	1	11.1	100.0
Longer than 7 days	0	0.0	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

Staff was also asked if they felt their current patterns of timeliness were appropriate to contact clients upon receiving a request as demonstrated in Table nine (below). Seventy-eight percent of the staff felt that the time it took them to get back to the clients was appropriate while 22% felt it was not. The two staff members that did not feel their current efforts were appropriate reported timeliness one to two days and three to seven days respectively. This indicates that employees only felt that they were sufficiently prompt in their communication with clients if they were contacting them within the first two days of the request.

Table 9
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perception of Appropriate Response Time to Clients
Question: Do you feel that is an appropriate amount of time to respond?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	2	22.2	22.2
Yes	7	78.8	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

Because the large majority of staff is getting back to the clients within at least one to two days, it is no surprise that the majority of clients are either satisfied or very satisfied with the response time.

Results: Communication Channels

One of my research questions addressed the following issues: To what extent does computer-mediated communication have a positive or negative impact on client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication. The purpose of the following questions was to evaluate the communication channels and directly address this research question.

Indicating all of the methods of communication that they used to contact Tobler & Associates, Table 10 (below) shows an overwhelming 90% of respondents said that they used the telephone to contact the firm. Just over half contacted the firm in-person and just under half utilized email. Some (28%) also sent paper-based forms of communication to the firm.

Table 10
Frequency Distribution of Channels used by Clients to Communicate with Tobler & Associates

Question: Which method(s) of communication did you use to contact with Tobler & Associates? Check all that apply (N=29).

Response	*f*	%
In-person	16	55.2
Telephone	26	89.7
Email	14	48.3
Paper, letters, or fax	8	27.6
Other	0	0.0
Total	**64**	

When asked how Tobler & Associates typically contacted them, there was a slight increase in the amount of email utilization, which was recorded in Table 11 (below) at 55%, but the degree to which the telephone was utilized was still the highest at 86%. In-person contact dropped to 31%. Paper-based forms of communication remained exactly the same at 28%.

Table 11
Frequency Distribution of Channels used by Tobler & Associates to Communicate with Clients
Question: Which communication channel(s) did Tobler & Associates use to contact you? Check all that apply (N=29).

Response	*f*	%
In-person	9	31.0
Telephone	25	86.2
Email	16	55.2
Paper, letters, or fax	8	27.6
Other	1	3.4
Total	**59**	

The next question in Table 12 (p. 36) asked which channel of communication was used the most regardless of who initiated the contact. Again, a large majority of 69% listed the telephone as being used the most. Email was utilized second most frequently but with only 17% usage. Face-to-face communication was utilized at 10% while 3% listed “other” as the primary method of communication used. In comments for “other”, one participant said that both the telephone and email were used depending on the purpose of the communication.

Table 12

Frequency Distribution of Clients Perception of Communication Channel Used Most Frequently

Question: Out of all communications with Tobler & Associates, regardless of who contacted the other, which communication method was most often used?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
In-person	3	10.4	10.3
Telephone	20	69.0	79.3
Email	5	17.2	96.6
Paper, letters, or fax	0	0.0	96.6
Other	1	3.4	100.0
Total	**29**	**100.0**	

Coincidently, these results were strikingly similar to the results for preference of communication methods as indicated in Table 13 (p. 37). Seventy-two percent of respondents preferred using the telephone, 14% preferred using email, 10% preferred meeting in-person, and one person listed “other” as their preference, again stating that email or phone are preferential. These findings are straightforward and suggest that most clients prefer using the telephone as a primary communication channel with the firm.

Table 13
Frequency Distribution of Clients Preference of Communication Channel
Question: Which communication method did you prefer the most?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
In-person	3	10.4	10.4
Telephone	21	72.4	82.8
Email	4	13.8	96.6
Paper, letters, or fax	0	0.0	96.6
Other	1	3.4	100.0
Total	**29**	**100.0**	

Following the question regarding communication channel preference, participants were asked to justify their preference in an open-ended question. There were various reasons given, but it is clear that the majority of people prefer telephone to other communication forms due to its ease, convenience, and ability to enhance understanding through clarifying questions. A few people found email preferential for convenience and scheduling. For a full list of responses, please see Appendix F.

After running a cross tabulation between preference of communication channel and age, I was surprised to see that there was no correlation between age and communication method as I had originally anticipated. I believed that younger clients would prefer email as the main channel of communication and the older generation would much prefer using the telephone or meeting in-person. However, no significant association exists between the method of communication and age for the clients of this law firm.

Employees were also asked about communication channels. The first employee question of this section as referenced in Table 14 (p. 38) asks which communication channel(s) they use to initiate contact with their clients. Almost all respondents chose both telephone and email with only one employee who chose a paper-based method.

Table 14

Frequency Distribution of Channels used by Tobler & Associates to Communicate with Clients

Question: Which communication channel(s) do you use to initiate contact with clients? Check all that apply (N=9).

Response	*f*	%
In-person	0	0.0
Telephone	8	88.9
Email	7	77.8
Paper, letters, or fax	1	11.1
Other	0	0.0
Total	**16**	

However, in the following question, as shown in Table 15 (p. 39), the results demonstrated that regardless of who initiated the contact, the telephone was definitively used most often. Referring back to the client results, this is likely because it is the preference of the majority of clients. No major discrepancies exist.

Table 15
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perception of Communication Channel Used Most Frequently

Question: In your communications with the clients, regardless of which party initiated the contact, which channel was used most often? (N=9)

Response	*f*	%
In-person	0	0.0
Telephone	8	88.9
Email	2	22.2
Paper, letters, or fax	0	0.0
Other	0	0.0
Total	**10**	

In regards to the staff's preference of communication methods, it appears they are evenly split. Table 16 (below) shows that 44% prefer telephone while 44% prefer email, and one person prefers to communicate however the individual client prefers.

Table 16
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Preference of Communication Channel

Question: Which communication channel do you prefer?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
In-person	0	0.0	0.0
Telephone	4	44.4	44.4
Email	4	44.4	88.8
Paper, letters, or fax	0	0.0	88.8
Other	1	11.1	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

The summation of results regarding communication channels suggests that telephone communication is clearly the favorite of clients, and most often used. However, employees equally prefer to communicate via email, which is indicated as the second most used form of communication, and likewise the second preferred by clients.

Results: Information Sharing

The next set of questions address the research question: “How effective is the communication at Tobler & Associates as it relates to client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication?” There are specific questions about client satisfaction and miscommunication. Other questions related to information sharing were included to help determine if the staff is sharing enough, too much, or the right amount of information and if they are able to articulate that information well to the clients.

The first question in the set is meant to determine if the quantity of information that Tobler & Associates shares with its clients is adequate. This is shown in Table 17 (p. 41). The large majority (75%) felt that they shared the right amount of information with them while only 14% felt that they did not share enough information. There were 3 respondents that indicated extreme views, in which 1 person felt that that the information shared was completely insufficient, and two people felt that the information shared was completely excessive. These results would suggest that for the most part, Tobler & Associates is doing a decent job at informing their clients appropriately.

Table 17
Frequency Distribution of Client's Perception of Amount of Information Shared With Him/Her

Question: How much information did Tobler & Associates' representatives share with you about your case?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Completely insufficient	1	3.6	3.6
Not enough	4	14.3	17.9
The right amount	21	75.0	92.9
Too much	0	0.0	92.9
Completely excessive	2	7.1	100.0
Total	**28**	**100.0**	

Clients were then asked to rate their satisfaction regarding how well complex information about their case was explained to them. In Table 18 (p. 42), an overwhelming majority of 85% of respondents was either satisfied or very satisfied with the staff's capabilities to explain complex legal information to them so that they understood it. Only 11% felt some level of dissatisfaction. This clear result indicates that Tobler & Associates is doing a satisfactory job at articulating complex information to the clients at their level of understanding.

Table 18
Frequency Distribution of Client Satisfaction with Firm's Ability to Share Complex Information
Question: On average, how satisfied were you with the ability of Tobler & Associates to explain complex information to you so that you were able to understand it?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Very Dissatisfied	2	7.4	7.4
Dissatisfied	1	3.7	11.1
Neutral	1	3.7	14.8
Satisfied	11	40.7	55.5
Very Satisfied	12	44.4	100.0
Total	**27**	**100.0**	

The staff was asked parallel questions concerning quantity of information sharing as well as ability to explain complexities at a client level of understanding.

Table 19 (p. 43) demonstrates that the majority of the staff (67%) believes that they share the right amount of information with the clients about their case while 22% believe they share an excessive amount and 11% believe they do not share enough information about the case with the clients. These results closely mirror the ratings that clients provided in their perception of how much information they felt the staff shared. In general, it would seem that the claim that the right amount of information is being shared is accurate.

Table 19
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perception of Amount of Information Shared With Clients
Question: How much information do you feel you share with the clients about their case?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Not Enough	1	11.1	11.1
The right amount	6	66.7	77.8
Excessive	2	22.2	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

The staff's responses largely mirror client responses in terms of ability to share complex information. Forty-four percent felt very comfortable and another 44% felt comfortable. This is likely very accurate, considering that 44% of clients felt very satisfied and 41% felt satisfied with the staff's ability to explain complex information. Fortunately, none of the staff felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable, as indicated in Table 20 (below), but 11% felt neutral. It is evident that the staff is confident in their ability to articulate complicated matter to clients.

Table 20
Frequency Distribution of Employee Comfort Sharing Complex Information to Clients
Question: On average, how comfortable are you explaining complex information to clients so that they are able to understand it?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Very uncomfortable	0	0.0	0.0
Uncomfortable	0	0.0	0.0
Neutral	1	11.1	11.1
Comfortable	4	44.4	55.5
Very comfortable	4	44.4	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

Next, miscommunication was addressed. First, I needed to determine the number of clients that had experienced some form of miscommunication with the firm. Table 21 (below) shows that 75% of the respondents did not experience any miscommunication while 25% did.

Table 21
Frequency Distribution of Client's Perception of Occurrence of Miscommunication
Question: Was there ever any miscommunication between you and Tobler & Associates?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	21	75.0	75.0
Yes	7	25.0	100.0
Total	**28**	**100.0**	

Of the 7 clients who did experience miscommunication, Table 22 (below) shows that 5 of them (71%) experienced it over the phone while a couple of individuals experienced miscommunication in person, in paper-based channels, or by a complete lack of communication. Interestingly, no one reported miscommunication occurring via email.

Table 22
Frequency Distribution of Communication Channels in which Miscommunication Occurred
Question: In what form did this miscommunication occur? Check all that apply (N=7). (Question displays if miscommunication has occurred.)

Response	*f*	%
In-person	1	14.3
Telephone	5	71.4
Email	0	0.0
Paper, letters, or fax	1	14.3
Other	1	14.3
Total	**8**	

Table 23 (below) shows that of those who experienced miscommunication, 43% felt the issue was fixed in a satisfactory way while the other 57% did not feel it was resolved in a satisfactory way.

Table 23
Frequency Distribution of Miscommunication Resolved to the Satisfaction of the Client
Question: Was the miscommunication resolved in satisfactory way? (Question displays if miscommunication has occurred.)

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	4	57.1	57.1
Yes	3	42.9	100.0
Total	**7**	**100.0**	

Analysis of these results reveal a few interesting points. First, the majority of clients do not experience miscommunication with the staff indicating once again that the firm is doing a satisfactory job overall. Secondly, the miscommunication that does occur typically happens by telephone and never by email. This could be attributable to the fact that most communication happens by phone and less by email. However, as indicated in the questions above, email is utilized so more likely, Walther's explanation of CMC having the ability to avoid miscommunication is the explanation for this.

Next, the staff was asked similar questions about miscommunication as demonstrated in Table 24 (p. 46). Like the clients, the staff indicates that miscommunication is not commonplace. Only 13%, or one person, experienced it monthly, 63% experienced this less than once a month, and 25% never experienced miscommunication at all. These straightforward results demonstrate that overall, miscommunication does not happen frequently, but it does happen.

Table 24

Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perception of Miscommunication Occurrence with Clients

Question: On average, how frequently do you experience miscommunication between you and the clients?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
More than once a day	0	0.0	0.0
Daily	0	0.0	0.0
Weekly	0	0.0	0.0
Monthly	1	12.5	12.5
Less than once a month	5	62.5	75.0
Never	2	25.0	100.0
Total	**8**	**100.0**	

Usually, when the miscommunication does occur, Table 25 (p. 47) shows that it happens via telephone, which yielded 67%, or by paper-based forms of communication (50%). Only one person reported email being the medium of miscommunication. These numbers somewhat coincide with the results of the clients as they also felt that the majority of miscommunication does happen by telephone. However, the staff are much more confident than clients that miscommunication does not occur in face-to-face communication. Also, at least one employee has experienced miscommunication via email.

Table 25
Frequency Distribution of Communication Channels in which Miscommunication Occurred
Question: In what form does this miscommunication typically occur? Check all that apply (N=6).
(Question displays if miscommunication has occurred)

Response	*f*	%
In-person	0	0.0
Telephone	4	66.7
Email	1	16.7
Paper, letters, or fax	3	50.0
Other	0	0.0
Total	**8**	

The likely reason that the telephone had the highest response in miscommunication is because it is used the most often. However, it is hard to determine why there is a discrepancy in miscommunication for the other channels given the small sample size. It would have been ideal to leave a space for people to explain how the miscommunication occurred so that I could better understand how and why it is happening.

Another contradiction is that the entire staff felt that the miscommunication was usually resolved in a satisfactory way. Table 26 (p. 48) shows that this is quite different than the client's perceptions, in which less than 50% of those who have experienced miscommunication indicate that it was resolved to their satisfaction. This may indicate that a paradigm shift is necessary for the staff, in order to make sure that they are taking care of miscommunications to their client's satisfaction.

Table 26

Frequency Distribution of Miscommunication Resolution from Employee's Perspective

Question: Does the miscommunication usually resolve in satisfactory way? (Question displays if miscommunication has occurred)

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	0	0.0	0.0
Yes	6	100.0	100.0
Total	**6**	**100.0**	

In regards to information sharing, it appears that Tobler & Associates is doing a very good job at sharing the right amount of information with their clients, and communicating complex information regarding their case in a manner, which is easily understood by the client.

However, when it comes to miscommunication, there are some indicators that signal needed improvement. Although all results indicated that miscommunication occurrences are fairly low, it does appear that more miscommunication is occurring via the telephone than any other medium. The fact that the phone was used most frequently should be taken into account when considering that it is the channel that miscommunication usually occurs. Obviously, there is more opportunity for miscommunication since it is used most often. There is also a discrepancy between the perception of a satisfactorily resolved miscommunication occurrence, with employees feeling much more optimistic than employees regarding the resolution of miscommunication issues.

Results: Perceived Competency and Professionalism

The next set of questions attempts to determine the extent to which different forms of communication have a positive or negative impact on a client's confidence in the staff and the perceived competency and professionalism of the firm. In addition, an attempt is made to determine how perceived competency has led to a given level of client satisfaction.

First, respondents were asked how competent they felt the firm was based on ongoing communication. Table 27 (below) shows that the vast majority (68%) felt that Tobler & Associates was competent, while 14% felt they were somewhat competent, 4% felt neutral, and 14% felt that the firm was either somewhat incompetent or not competent at all.

Table 27

Frequency Distribution of Client's Perception of Tobler & Associates' Competence

Question: How competent did Tobler & Associates seem to you based on your ongoing communications with them?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Not competent	2	7.1	7.1
Somewhat not competent	2	7.1	14.2
Neutral	1	3.6	17.8
Somewhat competent	4	14.3	32.1
Competent	19	67.9	100.0
Total	**28**	**100.0**	

These statistics can be compared with a client's satisfaction regarding the firm's ability to answer questions. Table 28 (p. 50) shows that approximately 52% were very satisfied, 33% were satisfied, 4% felt neutral, 7% were dissatisfied, and 4% were very dissatisfied. Therefore, 82% of clients see the firm as more or less competent, and 85% were more or less satisfied with the firm's ability to answer questions. While analyzing perceived competency as a determining factor of satisfaction, an R^2 value of 0.70 was calculated. This indicates that 70% of the variation in satisfaction (as defined in the question) can be attributed to the perceived competency of the firm.

Table 28

Frequency Distribution of Client Satisfaction with Firm's Ability to Answer Questions

Question: When you had a question for Tobler & Associates, how satisfied were you in their ability to answer your question?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Very Dissatisfied	1	3.7	3.7
Dissatisfied	2	7.4	11.1
Neutral	1	3.7	14.8
Satisfied	9	33.3	48.1
Very Satisfied	14	51.9	100.0
Total	**27**	**100.0**	

With the importance of perceived competency as it relates to satisfaction, the next two questions asked participants to identify which communication channel they felt best and least allowed Tobler & Associates to demonstrate its competency.

The method in which clients felt the firm best presented itself was through face-to-face communication (in-person) as indicated in Table 29 (p. 51), which yielded 34% of the responses, while the telephone closely followed at 24% and "all" channels with 17%. Contrary to what might have been expected of computer-mediated communication, email achieved only 10% of the responses, which was the same as "none" of the channels. Though these results would indicate that Tobler & Associates could best demonstrate its competency in-person, the variance is too high to provide a definitive answer, given the close percentages and the small sample size.

Table 29
Frequency Distribution of Client's Perspective of Communication Channels that Best Allow the Firm to Demonstrate Competency

Question: Which method of communication allowed Tobler & Associates to best demonstrate its competence to you?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
In-person	10	34.5	34.5
Telephone	7	24.1	58.6
Email	3	10.4	69.0
Paper, letters, or fax	0	0.0	69.0
Other	1	3.4	72.4
All	5	17.2	89.6
None	3	10.4	100.0
Total	**29**	**100.0**	

However, when asking clients which form of communication least allows the firm to demonstrate competency in Table 30 (p. 52), a decisive 68% chose "none." A cross tabulation shows us that this is because they did not feel the firm demonstrated incompetence at all. The 9 individuals that had not rated the firm as being "competent," chose the telephone most frequently (18%). Also, the "all" category resulted in 7%, and the in-person and paper-based categories both resulted in 4%.

Table 30
Frequency Distribution of Client's Perspective of Communication Channels that Least Allow the Firm to Demonstrate Competency

Question: Through which communication channel did Tobler & Associates least demonstrate its competence to you?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
In-person	1	3.6	3.6
Telephone	5	17.9	21.5
Email	0	0.0	21.5
Paper, letters, or fax	1	3.6	25.1
Other	0	0.0	25.1
All	2	7.1	32.2
None	19	67.9	100.0
Total	**28**	**100.0**	

Both questions show email to be somewhat favorable, as 10% believe it to best demonstrate competence and 0% believe it to least demonstrate competence. "In-person" is still the clear favorite among clients as a mechanism for the firm to present itself as competent. The telephone can be both good and bad, possibly due to not only the lack of visual cues that you would get in-person, but also due to the inability to plan responses, such as you would get in email. It is possible that to best demonstrate competence, client communication be done more via face-to-face conversations.

Employees of Tobler & Associates were asked similar questions about demonstrating competence over various communication channels. Table 31 (p. 53) shows that the majority of staff felt that they could best present themselves as competent to clients over the phone (44%). In addition, 22% felt that face-to-face communication was best and another 22% felt that email was the best method for them. One person confidently felt he/she was able to best demonstrate competence to the clients through all channels.

Table 31
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perspective of Communication Channels that Best Allow the Firm to Demonstrate Competency

Question: Which communication channel do you believe best allows you to best demonstrate your overall competence to the clients?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
In-person	2	22.2	22.2
Telephone	4	44.5	66.7
Email	2	22.2	88.9
Paper, letters, or fax	0	0.0	88.9
Other	0	0.0	88.9
All	1	11.1	100.0
None	0	0.0	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

When it comes to least being able to demonstrate competence, it is not too big of a surprise that the majority of the staff chose "paper, letters, or fax" as shown in Table 32 (p. 54). It was somewhat of a surprise, however, that 33% of the staff don't feel that any communication medium hinders their ability to demonstrate competence. One person did choose telephone and someone else chose email as channels of communication that least demonstrated their competence.

Table 32
Frequency Distribution of Employee's Perspective of Communication Channels that Least Allow the Firm to Demonstrate Competency

Question: Which communication channel do you believe least allows you to demonstrate your overall competence to the clients?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
In-person	0	0.0	0.0
Telephone	1	11.1	11.1
Email	1	11.1	22.2
Paper, letters, or fax	4	44.5	66.7
Other	0	0.0	66.7
All	0	0.0	66.7
None	3	33.3	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

While there is some overlap, we see that there is a slight discrepancy between how the staff feels that they can best demonstrate competence, and how clients think competence is best presented. Given the results, telephone might be a less effective means of self-presentation, which would be a paradigm shift for some employees. Also, given the variation across client responses for the best and worst channels for demonstrating competency, it is fair to conclude that not all communication channels provide equity for self-presentation. This too is in conflict with the fact that 33% of staff thinks that they can present themselves as competent equally across all communication channels.

Much like the perceived competency, clients were also asked to grade the professionalism of Tobler & Associates across multiple communication channels. However, this time, instead of choosing the communication channel that most demonstrates or least demonstrates professionalism, they graded each channel on a Likert scale.

The results in Table 33 (below) suggest that overall, clients feel like Tobler & Associates comes across as professional across all channels. The highest rating followed suit of the competence question, saying that professionalism was best portrayed in-person. This was closely followed by telephone, written letters and then email. The means (between 4 and 5) and standard deviations (around 1) of each of the channels suggest that the firm falls somewhere in between "somewhat professional" and "very professional" for all communication channels.

Table 33
Matrix of Client's Perception of Tobler & Associates' Professionalism with Mean Rating

Question: Please grade the professionalism of Tobler & Associates regarding the following communication methods:

1 = Very Unprofessional
2 = Somewhat Unprofessional
3 = Neutral
4 = Professional
5 = Very Professional

Channel	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
In-person	1	1	2	2	23	4.55
Telephone	2	1	2	4	20	4.34
Email	1	1	6	0	16	4.21
Written letters	1	2	4	0	20	4.33

Results: Expectations and Satisfaction

The following questions also attempt to derive answers to a portion of the research question: "How effective is the communication at Tobler & Associates as it relates to client satisfaction, confidence in the staff, and avoidance of miscommunication?" More specifically, these questions are geared toward client satisfaction as it relates to communicated expectations and overall communication.

First, in Table 34 (below), clients were asked if expectations were communicated to them and also how well the outcome met their expectations. An astounding 96% of respondents claimed that the firm did attempt to set the expectations and likely outcome of the case upfront, but only 39% of them said that the outcome of the case met their expectations.

Table 34
Frequency Distribution of Clients that had Expectations set Upfront by the Firm

Question: At the beginning of your case, did Tobler & Associates attempt to communicate expectations of the process and likely outcome?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	1	3.7	3.7
Yes	26	96.3	100.0
Total	**27**	**100.0**	

Fortunately, Table 35 (below) showed another 36% of respondents claimed that the outcome exceeded their expectations, but the remaining 25% felt the outcome fell below their expectations.

Table 35
Frequency Distribution of Case Outcomes that Met Client Expectations

Question: How well did the outcome of the case meet your expectations?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Fell below my expectations	7	25.0	25.0
Met my expectations	11	39.3	64.3
Exceeded my expectation	10	35.7	100.0
Total	**28**	**100.0**	

These findings would suggest that although there has been a great effort to help the clients understand what they should expect, the actual results are not always in line with those expectations. There are many reasons that this might be the case, including that expectations are not communicated clearly enough or that the variability in case outcomes is too great to set accurate expectations.

When asking the staff about communicating expectations at the beginning of the case, Table 36 (below) shows that only about two-thirds claimed that they do so while the other 33% claimed they did not. This is in sharp contrast to the 96% of the clients that did feel that the firm tried to set expectations. It is difficult to understand why the clients felt the staff set the expectations early on and the staff did not. It may be that the staff feels that they are simply walking the client through the process and are not clearly setting realistic expectations. Another thing that this might indicate is that by not setting clear expectations, employees leave it to clients to “infer” expectations or create them on their own.

Table 36
Frequency Distribution of Employees that Set Expectations Upfront for Clients

Question: At the beginning of a case, do you attempt to communicate expectations of the process and likely outcome?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	3	33.3	33.3
Yes	6	66.7	100.0
Total	**9**	**100.0**	

The staff members that did claim to set expectations were asked a follow up question regarding how closely the outcome of the clients’ cases met the expectations that were set as indicated in Table 37 (p. 58). Eighty-three percent said that it met their expectations and 17% felt it fell below their expectations. These are very different perceptions than those of clients. Interestingly, no staff member chose the “exceeds expectations” option even though 36% of the clients chose this in the corresponding question.

Table 37
Frequency Distribution of How Close the Case Outcome Meets Expectations Given by Employee
Question: On average, how closely does the outcome of the clients' cases meet the expectations you have set? (Question displays if previous question was answered “yes”)

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Fell below my expectations	1	16.7	16.7
Met my expectations	5	83.3	100.0
Exceeded my expectation	0	0.0	100.0
Total	**6**	**100.0**	

Of the staff members that set expectations upfront, all but one believes that the outcome meets these expectations. However, we see that there is significantly more variation from the clients’ perspective. Given this, and the discrepancy between employees and clients on whether expectations are communicated upfront, it appears that there is room for further investigation and/or improvement here.

The next question in this section is related to the overall level of satisfaction that the clients have experienced with their ongoing communication. As indicated in Table 38 (p. 59), most were either very satisfied (41%) or satisfied (38%) with the overall communication. Only 7% felt neutral about it, 3% were dissatisfied, and 10% were very dissatisfied. This is great news that the large majority (79%) of respondents were satisfied or more with ongoing communication with the firm. There is, however, certainly room for improvement, which is discussed in the recommendations section of this report.

Table 38
Frequency Distribution of Client's Overall Satisfaction with Ongoing Communication

Question: Overall, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the ongoing communication between you and Tobler & Associates during the time that the firm worked on your case.

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
Very Dissatisfied	3	10.3	10.3
Dissatisfied	1	3.4	13.7
Neutral	2	6.9	20.6
Satisfied	11	37.9	58.5
Very Satisfied	12	41.4	100.0
Total	**29**	**100.0**	

The final question in this section asks the participants if they would recommend the firm to a friend based solely on the communication that they had with the firm. Table 39 (below) shows that 86% of respondents would recommend the firm while the other 14% they would not. Much like the previous question, these clear results would suggest that a large majority of people are fairly satisfied with the communication overall.

Table 39
Frequency Distribution of Client's Willingness to Provide Referrals Based on Communication

Question: Based only on the communication you had with Tobler & Associates via email, telephone, and face-to-face interaction, would you recommend this law firm to a friend?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	4	14.3	14.3
Yes	24	85.7	100.0
Total	**28**	**100.0**	

Results: Feelings Toward Settlement/Resolution

The final section of the survey again addresses client satisfaction, but as it relates to their settlement and the resolution of the case. The purpose of this is twofold. First, we want to determine if there is any interaction between satisfaction with the outcome, and satisfaction of the communication. It may be that if a person did not receive a very good settlement, it could skew their perception of the communication being measured. Second, it is important for Tobler & Associates to understand the satisfaction of their clients, as this is their core service offering.

Regarding the outcome of their settlement, Table 40 (below) shows that 78% of participants felt that Tobler & Associates did everything they could to maximize their settlement and the other 22% felt they did not. When asked why they did not feel like the firm did all they could, one person claimed it took 4 or 5 attempts before they were able to speak to anyone and another person felt that the process took too much time and the firm acted uninterested due to the smaller size of the case.

Table 40
Frequency Distribution of Client's Belief that Firm Did Everything It Could

Question: Do you believe that Tobler & Associates representatives did everything they could to maximize your settlement?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	6	22.2	22.2
Yes	21	77.8	100.0
Total	**27**	**100.0**	

Satisfaction was also measured by asking participants if they would recommend the firm to a friend based on their overall experience. As indicated below in Table 41 (p. 61), 85% said they would while the remaining 15% would not. Thus, we can conclude that overall satisfaction is closely aligned with satisfaction of the case outcome as well as most communicative satisfaction metrics.

Table 41
Frequency Distribution of Client's Willingness to Refer the Firm to a Friend
Question: Based on your settlement and overall experience at Tobler & Associates, would you recommend the firm to a friend?

Response	*f*	%	Cum %
No	4	15.4	15.4
Yes	22	84.6	100.0
Total	**26**	**100.0**	

A cross tabulation between these and other satisfaction questions does indicate that those who were dissatisfied with the settlement were also dissatisfied with various aspects of communications (frequency, timeliness, expectations and overall communication). Therefore, it could be that the poorly perceived communication led them to believe that the firm did not do everything they could to maximize the settlement.

The final question of the client survey was open-ended and asked for any additional thoughts or comments related to the firm's communication with the client. There was a range of responses. Of the clients that were content, clients stated their appreciation for the firm and often specified the staff members that assisted them. There were statements of the firm being caring, passionate, supportive, competent, and efficient. Clients that were dissatisfied with the firm felt that their cases were not given the attention necessary or it did not resolve in a manner that they felt acceptable. To read all of the comments, please see Appendix F.

Like the client survey, the final question of the employee survey asked for any additional comments. Two staff members conveyed the importance of setting realistic expectations.

Additionally, there was a comment advocating more frequent communication with clients. For a full list of employee comments, please see Appendix F.

Discussion

Overall, the findings from this survey were very positive and showed high levels of satisfaction and effective communication. The survey's response rate was not as positive. Although there were over 600 clients contacted to take this survey, there were only 30 respondents. While a larger sample size would produce more definitively accurate results, the results that were achieved do seem to be very insightful.

Frequency

If one thing is clear from this section of the survey, it is that clients desire frequent communication. Surprisingly, though, only half of them were usually in contact with the firm more than once a month, which is the frequency that most participants would have preferred. Clients that were in contact with Tobler & Associates one or more times per month were significantly more satisfied than those who were not. None of the participants that were in contact with the firm less than once per month indicated that they were satisfied with it.

While the consensus among clients appears to be a preference for more frequent communication, the majority of the staff at Tobler & Associates felt that they should be in contact with their active clients once a month. Although this could be adequate for clients, only about 50% of them said that they contact their clients at least once per month. This is a great opportunity for improvement.

Timeliness

Very similar to frequency, it has been shown that customer satisfaction increases as response time decreases. The findings in this short section of the survey demonstrated that the staff and the clients had a very comparable perception of the firm's timeliness. A large majority of both groups of participants claimed that the staff responded to the clients within either 24 hours or within 1 and 2 days. Not only did the majority of the staff feel that this was an appropriate amount of time to respond, but also, the majority of clients were satisfied with that response time as well.

Communication Channels

The results of the survey indicated that when it comes to communicating with Tobler & Associates about their case, clients much prefer the telephone to other communication mediums. This is not to say that they don't prefer other forms of communication channels in other contexts, but for some reason they prefer speaking via the phone to discuss or learn about their case. Some of the reasons that were given for the clients' preference in speaking on the phone were its ease, convenience, and ability to enhance understanding.

It seems that one reason that clients prefer the telephone to email is due to the complex nature of the service being rendered. The telephone allows for clients to ask clarifying questions, receive instant answers, and perhaps reduce misunderstandings. Having a synchronous conversation accounts for many of these reasons the clients prefer the telephone. For the opposite reasons, email has some limitations especially in the form of having an asynchronous conversation. This is contrary from what we would have expected given the hyperpersonal model. From the overall results, including those about perceived competence and general satisfaction, face-to-face communication is thought of to be most effective. However, in this context, it is not convenient for clients to meet with staff from Tobler & Associates on a regular basis. For example, one person said he liked the telephone "because of my limited mobility."

Although the telephone was used most, the staff actually prefers to use email as much as the telephone. This would suggest that either the clients are initiating the communication more by phone, or that the staff is being considerate of what the clients wants.

Staff might have a greater affinity for email partly due to its asynchronous nature. It can be more efficient than telephone in terms of time, and it allows them to carefully compose responses or find answers to questions. It also creates a queuing effect that allows for better prioritization and compartmentalization than when constantly receiving phone calls. There are also some clients who reported a preference for email due to some of these reasons. While the telephone is the clear favorite of clients, email will likely still play an important role.

It should also be noted that a cross tabulation was performed between communication channel preference and age. I originally thought that there would be a strong correlation between age and preference in communication. More specifically, I thought younger clients would much prefer email in communication channel. However, there was no statistically significant correlation between the clients' age and their preference in method of communication. Given the amount of technology that is readily available to everyone, perhaps age no longer becomes relevant. With the ease of checking email from one's phone, computer, or laptop, email is not exclusive to the young and technologically savvy any longer.

Information Sharing

Results of the survey from both the client's and employee's points of view are very positive in regards to the staff's ability to: (1) share the right amount of information, and (2) communicate complexities at the appropriate level of understanding. Although there were some outliers, 75% of clients felt that they received the right amount of information, and 85% were satisfied with the staff's ability to share complex information. It is also evident that staff members are confident in their own abilities, as no one stated that they were at all uncomfortable sharing complex information. While some continuous improvement in this area should always be a goal, indicators for these two issues are very good.

Another aspect of information sharing is miscommunication. Again, the results are mostly positive. The majority of clients are not experiencing miscommunication with staff members, which further supports the idea that the staff's ability to share complex information and the right quantity of information is very good. One interesting part, however, is that when miscommunication does occur, it is usually by telephone. This is most likely attributable to the fact that this channel is used the most frequently, therefore providing the most opportunity for the miscommunication to occur. However, it could also be understood that email leaves less room for misunderstandings.

While it is positive that miscommunication is not occurring very often, it is disconcerting that over half of the clients that experienced miscommunication did not feel that it was resolved in a satisfactory manner. In sharp contrast, 100% of the staff thought that the miscommunication was usually resolved in a satisfactory way. Thus, it appears that the staff is overly confident that miscommunication is resolved when it is really not. In retrospect, it would have been very informative to ask clients what the miscommunication was about, and why it was not resolved. In order to better understand this discrepancy, more investigation is likely required.

Another interesting result is that half of the staff felt that most of the miscommunication occurred by paper, letters, or fax. This would seem logical, however, only one client reported miscommunication occurring this way. Written forms of communication, whether paper-based or email, seem to produce less miscommunication. This could be due to the fact that one has the ability to thoughtfully craft and edit these messages before sending them, or because clients can refer back to these to re-read the message or even call the firm with questions. However, it should be noted that the sample size of clients that indicated a channel in which miscommunication occurred is very small, so further research would have to be done to draw a definitive conclusion.

Perceived Competency and Professionalism

Overall, Tobler & Associates are perceived as both very competent and professional based on the firm's communication with clients. The results were both positive and encouraging. This is good news, since the results also indicated that 70% of the variation in customer satisfaction regarding staff abilities to answer questions could be attributed to the perceived competence of the firm.

Perhaps more insightful information was found in regards to which method of communication allows the staff to best demonstrate its competence and professionalism to clients. For the most part, clients believed that for both purposes, face-to-face communication is most advantageous. Interestingly, the telephone was seen as the second best way to demonstrate competence, but also the least effective way to demonstrate competence. There are obviously mixed feelings about this medium. This should definitely be addressed, considering that the telephone is the top client preference for communication.

Email was not seen as a particularly great way to portray competence, but nobody cited it as the least effective way to demonstrate competence. Therefore, when done correctly, there is likely potential here to optimize self-presentation. Papers, letters, or fax was not chosen at all and therefore should be considered when the staff is making decisions about keeping in touch with clients.

While the telephone can be both good and bad for self-presentation, most staff members believe it to be the best channel. Therefore, either more work needs to be done to manage self-presentation across the phone or else in-person meetings should be utilized when self-presentation is of particular importance. Some staff members also indicate that they can demonstrate competence equally across all mediums. Given the variation in client responses, this would not seem to be true. Therefore, staff members should realize that while certain best practices should be followed per communication channel to manage self-presentation, some channels are better than others.

Expectations and Satisfaction

A very interesting discrepancy exists in regards to setting expectations. An overwhelming majority of clients (96%) say that the staff did communicate expectations of the process and likely outcome to them. This is fantastic, however, one-third of the employees say that they do not communicate expectations to their clients at the beginning of a case. It could be that almost all of the clients that responded to the survey worked with staff members that do attempt to communicate expectations. Or, more likely, it could be that by not communicating expectations, the clients are left to interpret anything the staff member says as “expectation setting” and even rely on their own expectations thinking that they received it from the firm.

This latter argument would better explain why when 96% of clients say that expectations were communicated to them, 25% still reported outcomes that were below their expectations. It is important that Tobler & Associates sets these expectations so that an interpretation does not lead to misunderstanding. This number is in line with the number of employees that are not setting clear expectations upfront. It would also explain why almost all employees who do claim to set expectations believe that those expectations are met. It should be noted, however, that employees were asked *on average* if expectations were met, while clients were asked about their specific case. This could be why some clients' expectations were exceeded, but no employee thought this to be the norm. Still, with 75% of clients stating that the outcome of the case either met or exceeded their expectations, this is a very positive sign for Tobler & Associates.

Furthermore, a large majority of the clients were either satisfied or very satisfied with the ongoing communication during the time that they worked on their case. Also, considering their high level of satisfaction, it came as no surprise that 86% of the respondents would in fact recommend the firm to a friend based solely on the good communication. The firm can be very proud of these findings.

Feelings Toward Settlement/Resolution

The last section of the survey also yields very positive results. We see that a large majority (78%) of clients do believe that the firm did everything it could to maximize their settlement, and an even larger portion of clients (85%) would recommend the firm to a friend. Obviously, these findings would suggest a high level of overall satisfaction with the settlement and the experience with the firm.

Some of the clients who were not satisfied reported that it was because they were being bounced around between paralegals, having to call 4-5 times before getting a response, the firm dropping the case, the process taking too much time, being deprioritized, the firm failed to request documents on a timely basis, and the firm acted very uninterested in the case. It is very likely that clear and effective communication would alleviate all of these problems. Also, since the satisfaction with the case outcome was so closely correlated with other satisfaction metrics (frequency, timeliness, expectations and overall communication), it is likely that by improving those individual communication issues, a clients perception that the firm is doing everything that it can to maximize the settlement will be increased.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations that are based on analysis from the survey results in order to improve client communication:

Maintain contact with clients at least once per month.

Based on survey results, clients would prefer to be in contact with the firm more than once a month while the staff feels that once a month is appropriate. Therefore, I would recommend that Tobler & Associates set a goal to maintain contact with every active client at least once per month. Although many clients preferred to be in contact more than once a month, the satisfaction levels in the survey indicated that once a month would suffice. In order to make this cadence work, I recommend two courses of action. First, the staff should set clear expectations with the clients upfront as to how often the firm will be in contact with them. This would clear up any misconceptions about frequency. Staff can also explain that unless there is an urgent matter, it is not typically necessary to be in contact more than once a month. Second, once the expectation is set, you must follow through with this goal and verify that each client has been in contact with the firm at least once a month. This can typically be done through the use of the software.

Set a goal of responding to clients within 24 hours (Monday through Friday).

Tobler & Associates is doing a great job responding to clients within the first day or two of contact. In the spirit of continuous improvement, I recommend setting a standard of responding to clients within 24 hours on business days. This is valuable because it is closely related to client satisfaction. When an employee will be unavailable for more than 24 hours, a message should be left on their voicemail and an automatic response sent from their email indicating when they will be back in the office and who can address any urgent matters in the mean time. Additionally, if more time is needed to answer the client's inquiry, the client should be contacted to let them know that the staff if currently working on finding an answer to his/her question.

Contact the client by the method that they find preferential.

A large majority of clients prefer using the telephone when communicating with the firm. However, it would not be wise to assume that all clients feel this way, as some will prefer email. I therefore recommend that you ask the clients during the initial consultation what their particular preference is (e.g. phone, email, letter), make a note of it in their file, and contact them based on their preference. However, there are times that having certain communication in writing is advantageous and clearly the better choice. Therefore, like frequency of communication, you must clearly set expectations with the client that while you will make every attempt to contact them via his/her preferred method, there will be times when things are required to be in writing. Staff members will ultimately have to use their best judgment when deciding which channel of communication to use.

Don't assume that miscommunication has been resolved.

Employees of the firm are well versed at explaining the right amount of information, explaining complexities at the client's level of understanding, and minimizing miscommunication. However, when miscommunication does occur, not all clients feel that it is resolved to their satisfaction. Yet employees are assuming that it is being resolved. Therefore, more effort must go into resolving miscommunications when they are identified. Consider asking the client to repeat back their understanding in order to make sure it is resolved. Another idea based on survey findings is to write a carefully constructed email or letter that logically walks the client through the point of confusion.

Establish perceived competence during your first in-person meeting.

While there was significant variance in the best channels for conveying competence, it was clear that face-to-face communication most instilled the perception of competence in clients. Therefore, during the initial consultation, it is imperative that self-presentation as it relates to competence, is carefully managed. Then, throughout the life of the case, competence can likely be maintained via telephone or email. If during the course of the case, demonstrating competence is necessary to increase customer satisfaction or retain a client, it is best to ask them to come into the office for a meeting.

Improve self-presented professionalism through good writing.

Although Tobler & Associates is largely seen as very professional, the lowest scores were seen in email and written letters. I would therefore recommend that staff members carefully edit messages before they are sent to the client. Even though employees are very busy, incomplete sentences, improper use of grammar, misspellings, and the wrong use of punctuation can all affect the clients' perception of the firm's professionalism. While this is often okay in inter-office emails, you must keep in mind who your audience is for the message you craft.

Set explicitly clear expectations at the beginning of a case.

As already mentioned, it is imperative to set clear expectations about frequency of communication, response time, and communication methods to be used. However, I would also recommend that all staff members set realistic expectations about the likely outcome of the case and attempt to clear up any pre-conceived notions that are inaccurate. This will increase customer satisfaction. Additionally, while it is always better to under promise and over deliver, you must find a balance as to not lose clients to firms that promise more. Setting accurate expectations is that balance most often.

Avoid reassigning client cases to different staff member when possible.

Based on the feedback received, it is important to be aware that clients like consistency and do not like being shuffled around. It makes them feel unimportant and that the firm is not doing everything it can to maximize their settlement. While this is not always possible, I would recommend striving for this consistency. When a reassignment is necessary, clearly communicate the reasons to the client and reassure them of his/her cases importance and progress.

Communicate bad news early.

Based on another piece of feedback received from a disgruntled client, it is important to always keep the client up-to-date of the status even if the information you're providing is not favorable. The client will likely be upset with the news that the staff is sharing, but will be even more upset if there is a significant delay in telling him/her. For example, if a case is identified as lacking necessary credentials to move forward, let the client know as early on as possible.

Conclusion

Both the staff and the participating clients from Tobler & Associates provided valuable insight into various aspects of communication at the firm. Overall, the majority of clients were very satisfied with the communication, the overall experience, and the outcome of their case.

Many of the insights that were attained are not necessarily novel. It makes complete sense that clients would prefer more frequent communication regarding their case, and that they would be more satisfied with shorter response times. It also could be seen as common sense that setting clear and accurate expectations upfront helps manage the process and increases their satisfaction in the outcome. However, the true value in the survey is that it provides a pulse-check or a baseline of how the firm is currently doing with these things, and where it can improve. Therefore, the recommendations that are provided for frequency, timeliness and setting expectations are to further enhance the already outstanding reputation that Tobler & Associates has.

Other insights from the survey may be more novel. For example, I was able to discover that for the most part, clients prefer communication via a telephone when it comes to discussing their case, more than any other medium. This is true even regardless of age. However, we also see that because all clients are different, these communications channels can potentially be customized to suit the needs of the client. Additionally, we discovered that both professionalism and competence are likely best-portrayed in-person.

Some of the most valuable insights were discrepancies between what employees perceive and what clients perceive to be reality. One example of this is the resolution of miscommunications, which while employees have perceived as resolved, has not been perceived as such by the client. Another major example is that even when employees don't feel like they are setting expectations, clients seem to believe that expectations are being communicated to them.

Tobler & Associates is already seen as a competent and professional firm that has been tremendously successful at satisfying its clients. To further this, these valuable baselines, insights and even discrepancies can help the firm identify areas for continuous improvement.

Survey Results and the Hyperpersonal Model

Given the theoretical component of this capstone project, I wanted to compare the findings from the survey to the research that has been done on the Hyperpersonal Model. The form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) applicable to Tobler & Associates, which was analyzed, is email. This is one of the main communication channels that the firm utilizes. The data from this assessment of client communication yielded results that both supported and contradicted expectations of the Hyperpersonal Model.

The first significant finding in this survey, regarding communication channels, was that the telephone was the preferred channel of communication by the clients, far beyond email. When asked in an open-ended question why the clients chose their preferred method of communication, many clients wrote that ease and convenience were huge factors, as well as the ability to ask clarifying questions. This contradicts the Hyperpersonal Model, as CMC has been described by Walther, as being "…more socially desirable..." (1996, p.17) and a superior method of communication. This discrepancy could be partly due to the unique nature of the legal industry, in which receivers prefer to discuss their particular case over the phone because they can elicit more complex information quickly. However, regardless of the reason, there is a clear preference by clients to communicate with legal staff from Tobler & Associates over the phone.

The second significant finding regarding CMC was that none of the clients listed email as a source of miscommunication. This finding supports the hyperpersonal model as the legal staff (sender) has the opportunity to carefully craft and edit each message to avoid any potential miscommunication and manage his/her impression. This is possible because email is an asynchronous channel. Walther believes that self-presentation is easier when using CMC, resulting in better impression management and a superior method of communication than that of FtF interactions.

The third significant finding was based on the topic of perceived competence. The survey results were somewhat contradicting to one another. One question asked the clients which communication channel allowed Tobler & Associates to best demonstrate its competence. Face-to-face was chosen as the best method and email ranked second to last. These results would suggest that contrary to the Hyperpersonal Model, the employees are actually able to manage impressions of competence better in person than through CMC. However, in the next question, clients were asked which communication channel least allows the firm to demonstrate its competence. In this case, not a single person listed email. This would suggest that email is, at least to some degree, effective at allowing staff to portray themselves as competent. In 1992, Trevino & Webster determined that the sender has greater control over the impressions he/she gives off by using asynchronous communication. This could help explain why the clients did not feel as though email ever least demonstrated the staff's competence.

As a last example, the topic of professionalism was addressed. Although the majority of clients felt as though the staff was "very professional" when using email all of the other methods of communication received higher scores. These findings could be argued either way. On one hand, the majority of clients did feel that the staff was very professional when using email, thus supporting email as a good method for impression management. On the other hand, face-to-face, telephone, and even written letters all ranked higher than email it their ability to demonstrate professionalism. If the Hyperpersonal Model is correct, one explanation for this is that employees were unintentionally sending nonverbal cues by not carefully editing their emails. As was discussed in the literature review, certain cues such as punctuation marks and spelling errors would lead to very strong impressions of the sender because cues are limited (Lea & Spears, 1992). Another possible reason could have been if there was a delay in response time to the clients via email. This could also significantly influence the clients' perception of the sender (Walther & Tidwell, 1995).

Although there has been substantial evidence and research to support the hyperpersonal model, the findings from this survey show both support and contrast. This is not to say that the CMC does not have the potential to become hyperpersonal, but that it may not be best for all clients communicating for Tobler & Associates. However, a thorough understanding of the Hyperpersonal Model could still prove to enhance the communication strategies of the firm.

Capstone Project Lessons Learned

Throughout the course of this capstone project, I have learned some very valuable lessons. First, it is important to acknowledge that it is hard to generalize the results of a survey based on such a small sample size. Ideally, there would have been a pilot study in addition to a much larger sample. Nevertheless, I do believe that this survey still produced valuable information. Secondly, and perhaps most obvious, was how much more effective a request to take an online survey is from an email invitation than from a mailed postcard (mass mail). I only received 8 completed surveys out of the 500 that I sent by mail versus 22 completed surveys out of 103 that were emailed. Based on cost, the email invitations were free, but it cost $31.25 per response for the postcards. Unfortunately, an email address is not a required piece of information that clients provide Tobler & Associates. For this reason the number of emails sent out was significantly lower than the requests made by mail. In fact, the firm only had 103 email addresses total.

The third lesson I learned is that one cannot assume that a familiarity will guarantee participation. I thought that because everyone who was receiving the survey knows Tobler & Associates, that they would be much more inclined to participate in the survey (as opposed to an unknown request). Furthermore, I included an incentive by doing a drawing for a $50 Visa gift card for anyone who completed the survey. I assumed that those two variables would result in a sufficient response rate. However, that was clearly not the case. Since I was not able to get enough responses via email, I had to send the postcards out. Even after sending out the postcards, I was again surprised at the low number of responses. It was obvious at this point that I would have to conduct my analysis with far fewer responses than I wanted.

Fourth, I have found that when analyzing the results of the survey, you often discover that some questions could have been better worded, or some follow-up questions should have been asked. Additionally, I believe that using more Likert scales would have provided more statistical information for comparison between all options, instead of simply asking participants to choose the “best” or “worst.” Ideally, I would be able to create all survey questions, and test them first on a small sample before sending them out to the target audience. However, given resource and time constraints, this was not feasible here. Something else that would have been beneficial, especially considering the low the response rate, would have been to take a more qualitative approach and conduct a focus group. This would have provided valuable insight into *why* the clients felt a certain way. Furthermore, in certain questions, such as the ones addressing the miscommunication, a focus group would have cleared up how the miscommunication occurred, and how it was or was not resolved.

Lastly, another valuable lesson I learned was that when trying to execute a project that involves many stakeholders, one must be flexible. Because I had taken the audience analysis class last year, and the survey that we did in class only took about one month to complete, I had a very skewed perception of how much time this project would take. However, I knew my capstone project would take longer as it is more involved and includes an extensive amount of research. Nevertheless, I did not take into consideration how many other parties were involved in this project and that everyone has other important responsibilities. Throughout this project, I had to be considerate of other’s time and realize that they had other obligations as well. This was a significant obstacle for me as I was hoping to finish my capstone in December of 2012 but instead had to extend into the Spring semester. I have always preferred to get assignments done in advance and not wait until the last minute to finish them. However, in this situation, I did not have much of a choice. Instead, I was forced to accept and adjust my original plan, teaching me a valuable lesson in adaptation.

I believe that any project will result in some unforeseen circumstances. Although frustrating at the time, this capstone project has provided me with great learning opportunities. In addition to the hands-on experience attained, one core lesson that I received from all the unexpected situations throughout the course of the project was to accept, adapt, and achieve.

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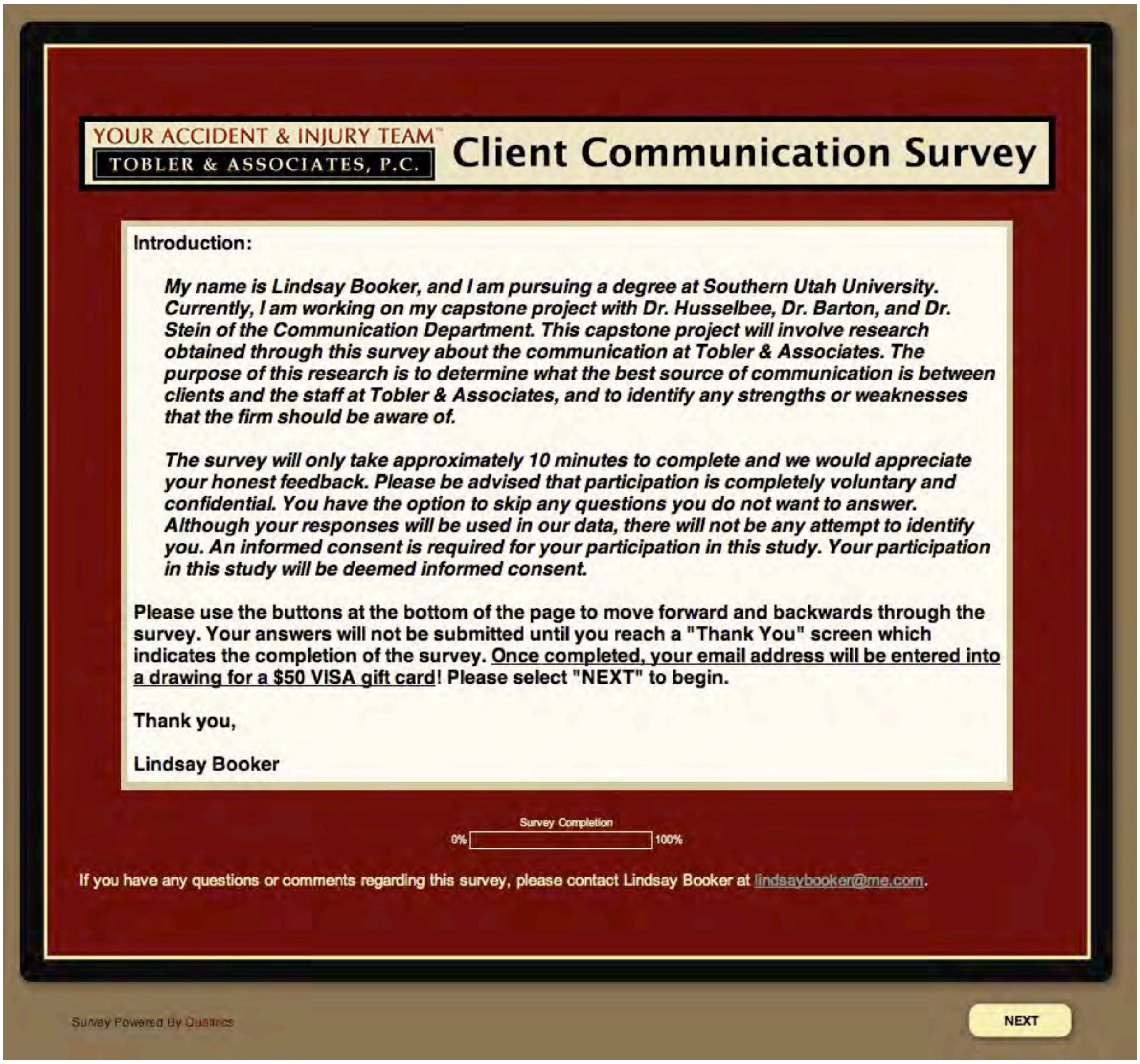
Appendix A – Client Communication Survey



YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

Introduction:

My name is Lindsay Booker, and I am pursuing a degree at Southern Utah University. Currently, I am working on my capstone project with Dr. Husselbee, Dr. Barton, and Dr. Stein of the Communication Department. This capstone project will involve research obtained through this survey about the communication at Tobler & Associates. The purpose of this research is to determine what the best source of communication is between clients and the staff at Tobler & Associates, and to identify any strengths or weaknesses that the firm should be aware of.

The survey will only take approximately 10 minutes to complete and we would appreciate your honest feedback. Please be advised that participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You have the option to skip any questions you do not want to answer. Although your responses will be used in our data, there will not be any attempt to identify you. An informed consent is required for your participation in this study. Your participation in this study will be deemed informed consent.

Please use the buttons at the bottom of the page to move forward and backwards through the survey. Your answers will not be submitted until you reach a "Thank You" screen which indicates the completion of the survey. <u>Once completed, your email address will be entered into a drawing for a $50 VISA gift card</u>! Please select "NEXT" to begin.

Thank you,

Lindsay Booker

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

NEXT

YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

Please describe on average how frequently you were in contact with Tobler & Associates while the firm was working on your case?

- More than once a month
- Once a month
- Once every other month
- Once every three months
- Less than once every three months

How satisfied were you with the frequency of communication that occurred between you and Tobler & Associates?

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

Please tell us how frequently you would have preferred to be in contact with Tobler & Associates.

- More than once a month
- Once a month
- Once every other month
- Once every three months
- Less than once every three months

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

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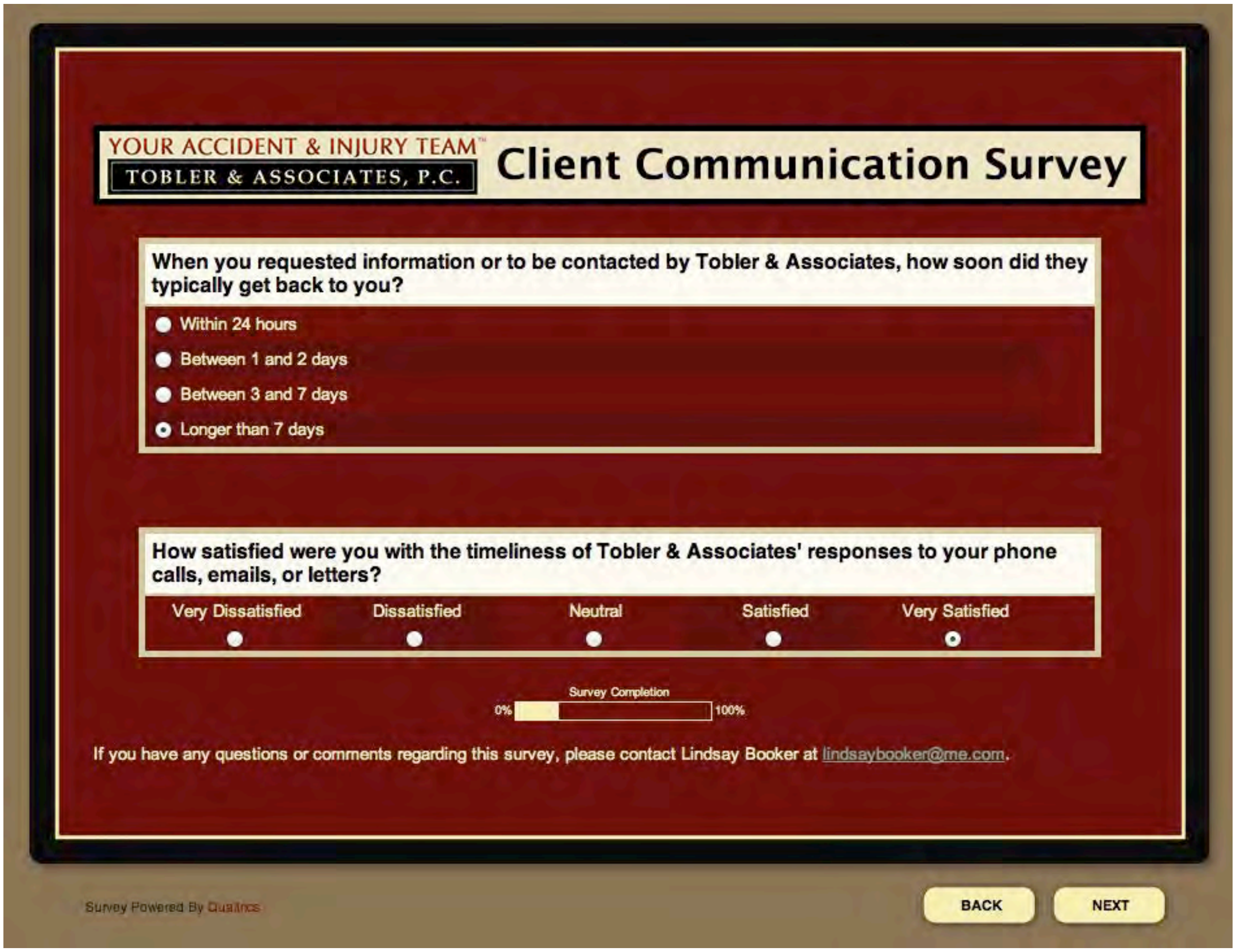
YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.
Client Communication Survey
When you requested information or to be contacted by Tobler & Associates, how soon did they typically get back to you?
Within 24 hours
Between 1 and 2 days
Between 3 and 7 days
Longer than 7 days
How satisfied were you with the timeliness of Tobler & Associates' responses to your phone calls, emails, or letters?
Very Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Neutral
Satisfied
Very Satisfied
Survey Completion
0%
100%
If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.
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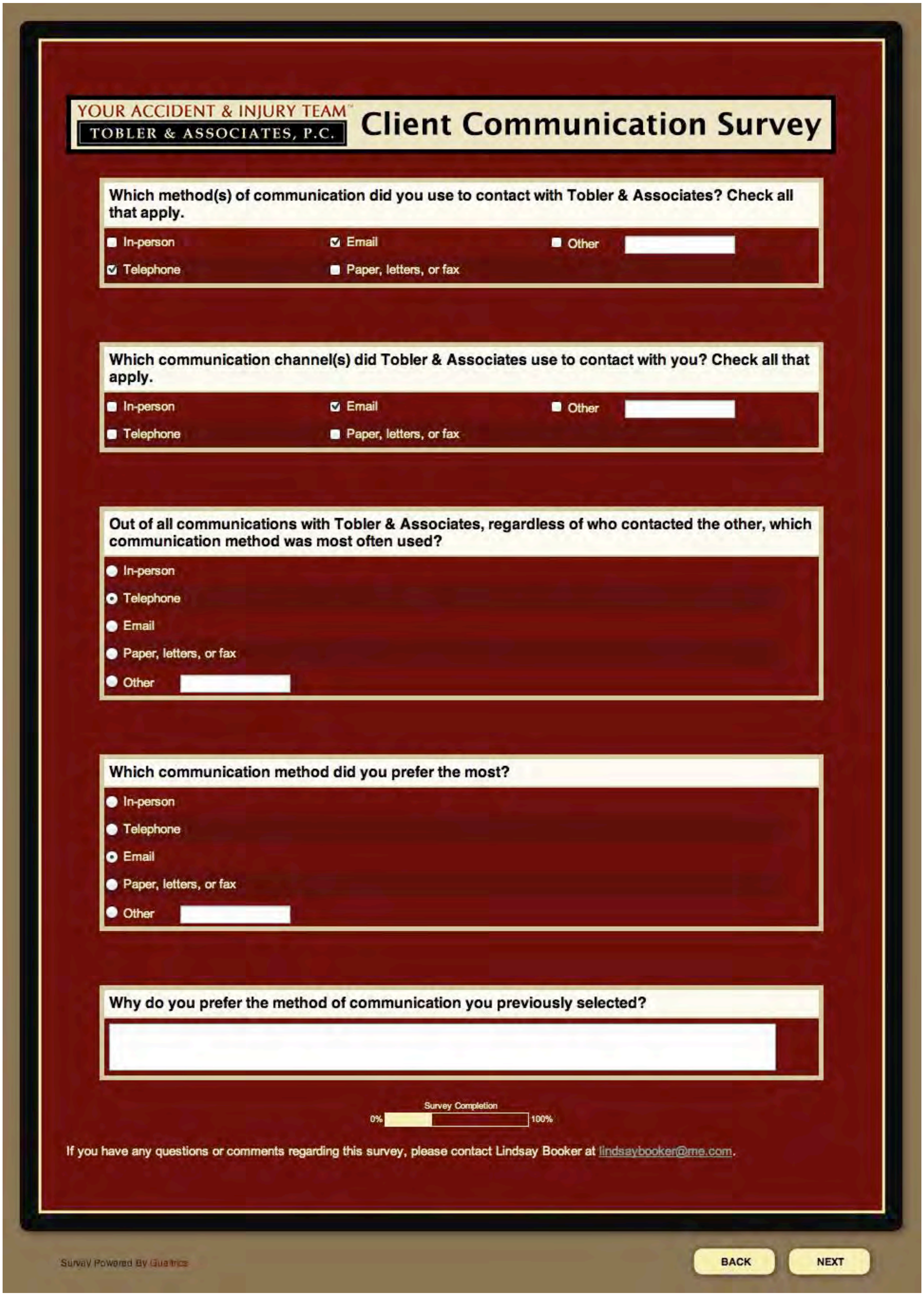

YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

Which method(s) of communication did you use to contact with Tobler & Associates? Check all that apply.

- [ ] In-person
- [x] Email
- [ ] Other
- [x] Telephone
- [ ] Paper, letters, or fax

Which communication channel(s) did Tobler & Associates use to contact with you? Check all that apply.

- [ ] In-person
- [x] Email
- [ ] Other
- [ ] Telephone
- [ ] Paper, letters, or fax

Out of all communications with Tobler & Associates, regardless of who contacted the other, which communication method was most often used?

- ○ In-person
- ◉ Telephone
- ○ Email
- ○ Paper, letters, or fax
- ○ Other

Which communication method did you prefer the most?

- ○ In-person
- ○ Telephone
- ◉ Email
- ○ Paper, letters, or fax
- ○ Other

Why do you prefer the method of communication you previously selected?

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

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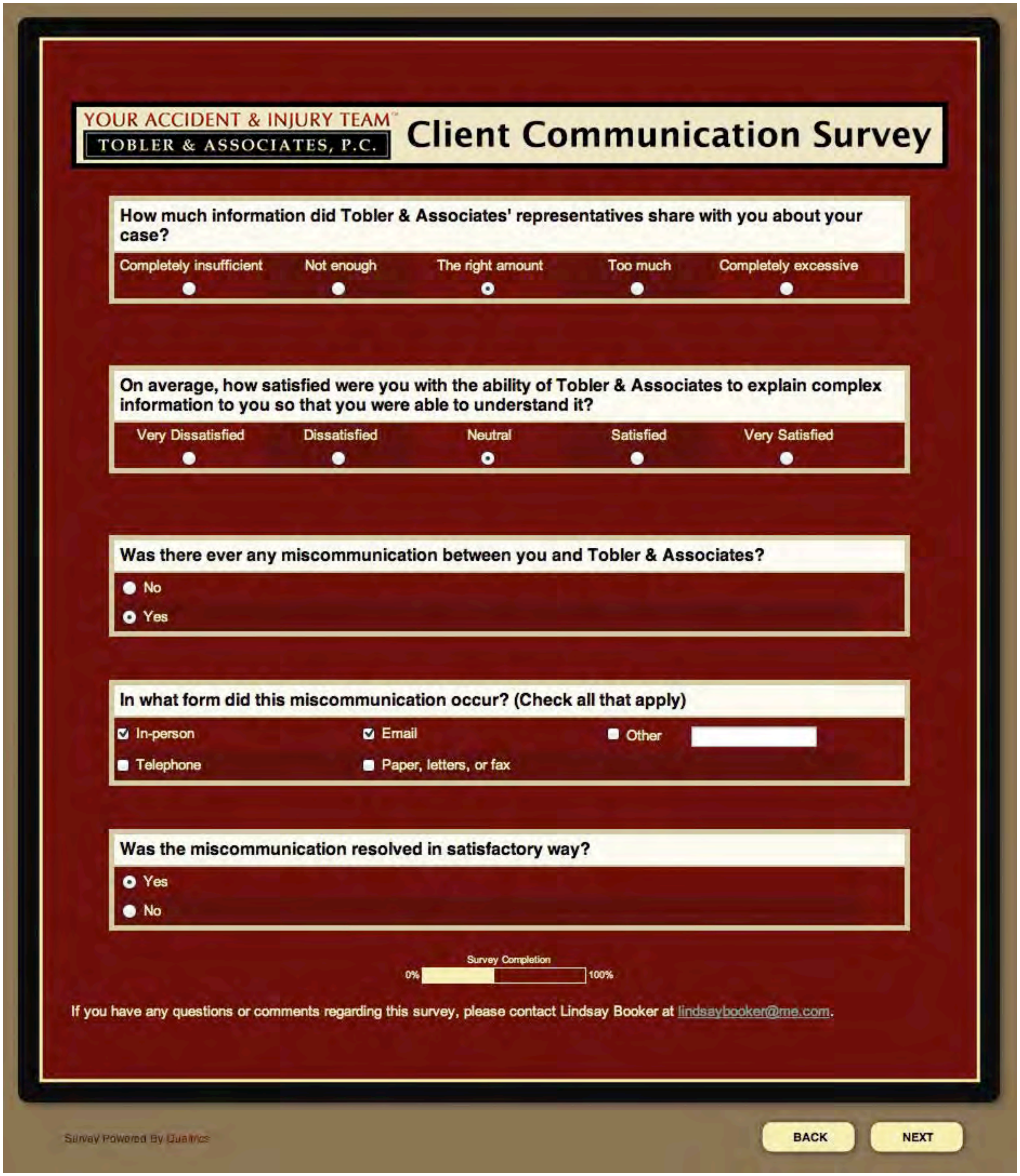

YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

How much information did Tobler & Associates' representatives share with you about your case?

Completely insufficient | Not enough | The right amount | Too much | Completely excessive

On average, how satisfied were you with the ability of Tobler & Associates to explain complex information to you so that you were able to understand it?

Very Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very Satisfied

Was there ever any miscommunication between you and Tobler & Associates?

- No
- Yes

In what form did this miscommunication occur? (Check all that apply)

- In-person
- Email
- Other
- Telephone
- Paper, letters, or fax

Was the miscommunication resolved in satisfactory way?

- Yes
- No

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

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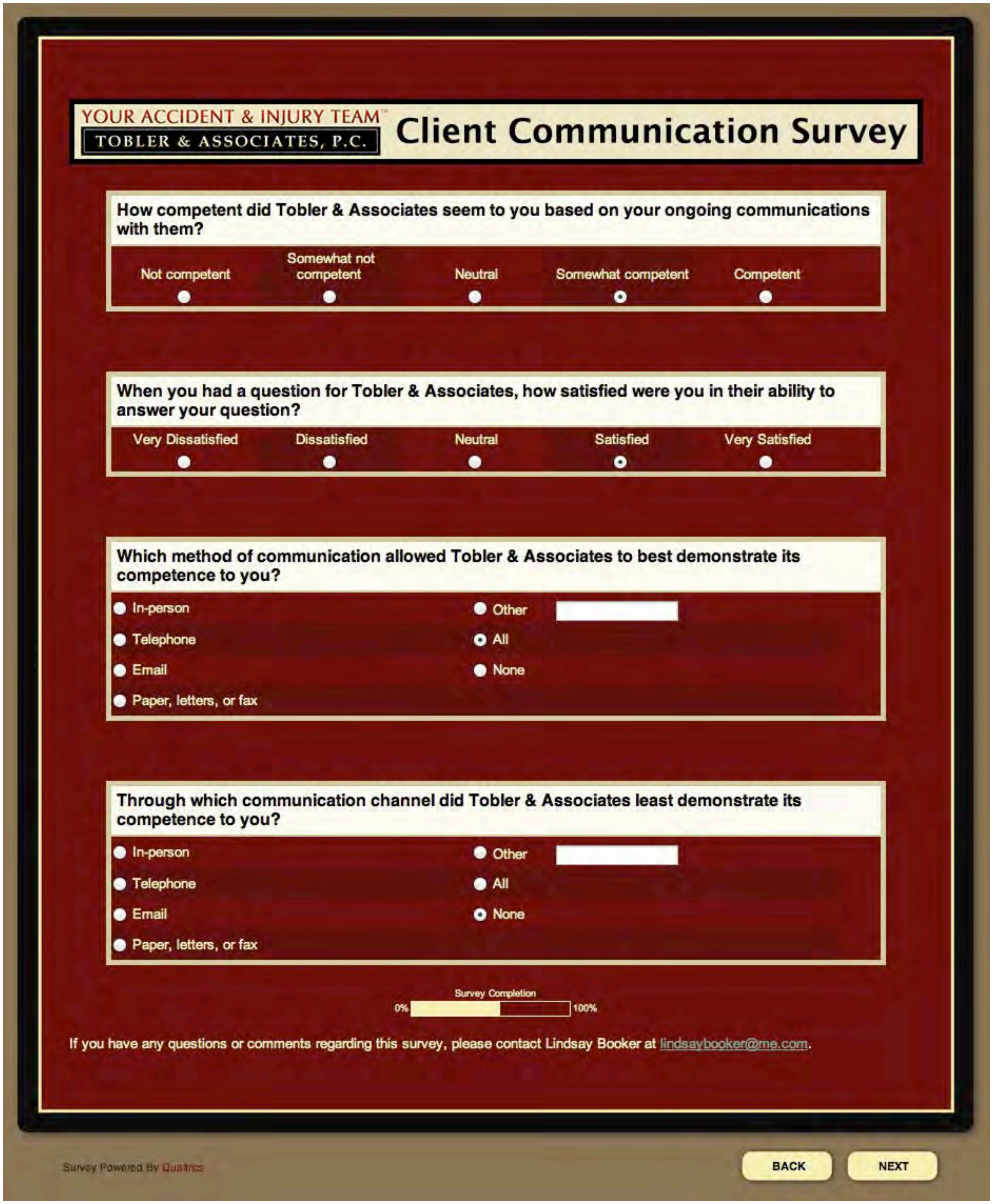

YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

How competent did Tobler & Associates seem to you based on your ongoing communications with them?

Not competent | Somewhat not competent | Neutral | Somewhat competent | Competent

When you had a question for Tobler & Associates, how satisfied were you in their ability to answer your question?

Very Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very Satisfied

Which method of communication allowed Tobler & Associates to best demonstrate its competence to you?

- In-person
- Telephone
- Email
- Paper, letters, or fax
- Other
- All
- None

Through which communication channel did Tobler & Associates least demonstrate its competence to you?

- In-person
- Telephone
- Email
- Paper, letters, or fax
- Other
- All
- None

Survey Completion

0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

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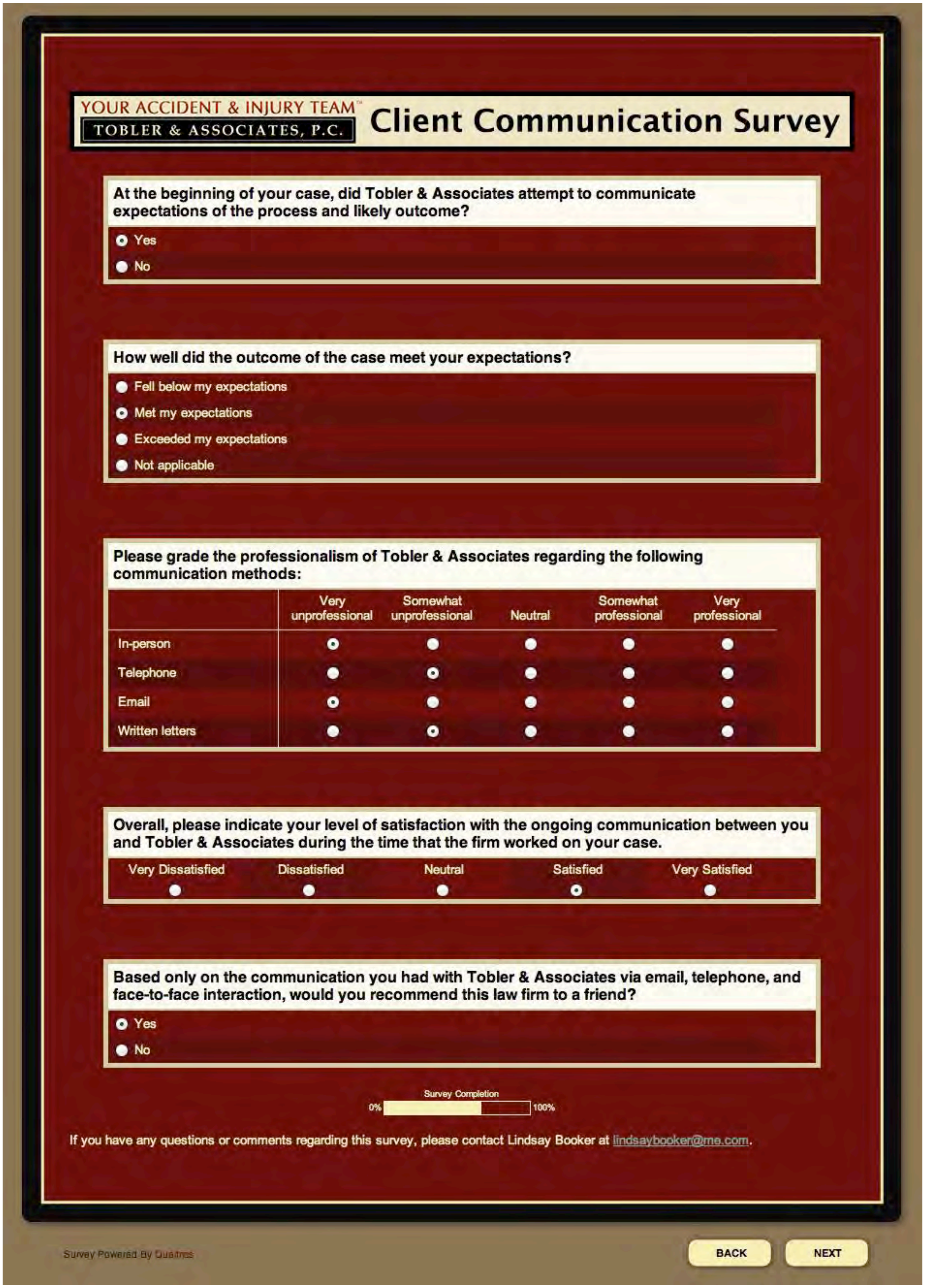

YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

At the beginning of your case, did Tobler & Associates attempt to communicate expectations of the process and likely outcome?

- Yes
- No

How well did the outcome of the case meet your expectations?

- Fell below my expectations
- Met my expectations
- Exceeded my expectations
- Not applicable

Please grade the professionalism of Tobler & Associates regarding the following communication methods:

	Very unprofessional	Somewhat unprofessional	Neutral	Somewhat professional	Very professional
In-person					
Telephone					
Email					
Written letters					

Overall, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the ongoing communication between you and Tobler & Associates during the time that the firm worked on your case.

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied

Based only on the communication you had with Tobler & Associates via email, telephone, and face-to-face interaction, would you recommend this law firm to a friend?

- Yes
- No

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

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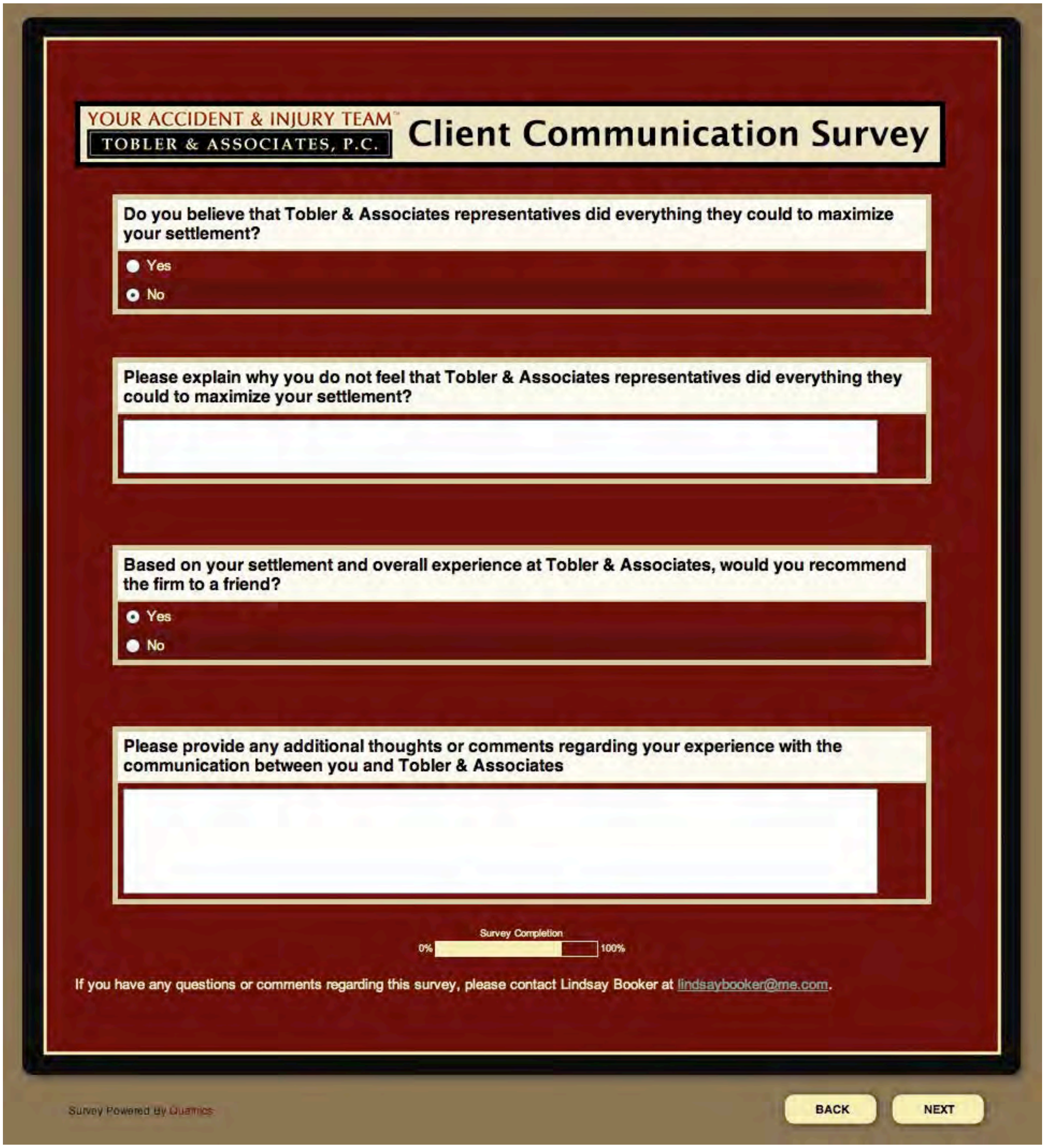

YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

Do you believe that Tobler & Associates representatives did everything they could to maximize your settlement?

- Yes
- No

Please explain why you do not feel that Tobler & Associates representatives did everything they could to maximize your settlement?

Based on your settlement and overall experience at Tobler & Associates, would you recommend the firm to a friend?

- Yes
- No

Please provide any additional thoughts or comments regarding your experience with the communication between you and Tobler & Associates

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

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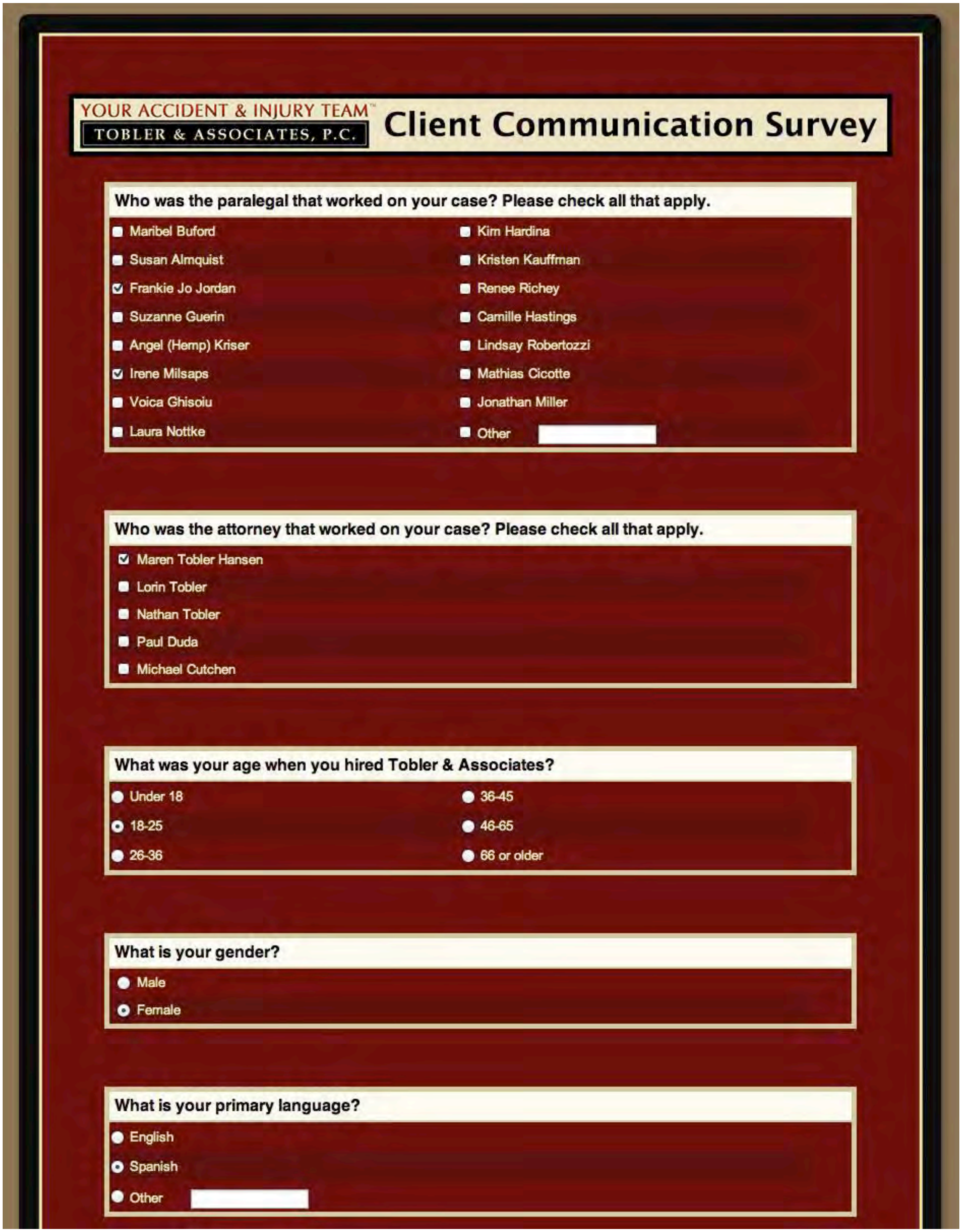


YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

Who was the paralegal that worked on your case? Please check all that apply.

- [ ] Maribel Buford
- [ ] Susan Almquist
- [x] Frankie Jo Jordan
- [ ] Suzanne Guerin
- [ ] Angel (Hemp) Kriser
- [x] Irene Milsaps
- [ ] Voica Ghisoiu
- [ ] Laura Nottke
- [ ] Kim Hardina
- [ ] Kristen Kauffman
- [ ] Renee Richey
- [ ] Camille Hastings
- [ ] Lindsay Robertozzi
- [ ] Mathias Cicotte
- [ ] Jonathan Miller
- [ ] Other

Who was the attorney that worked on your case? Please check all that apply.

- [x] Maren Tobler Hansen
- [ ] Lorin Tobler
- [ ] Nathan Tobler
- [ ] Paul Duda
- [ ] Michael Cutchen

What was your age when you hired Tobler & Associates?

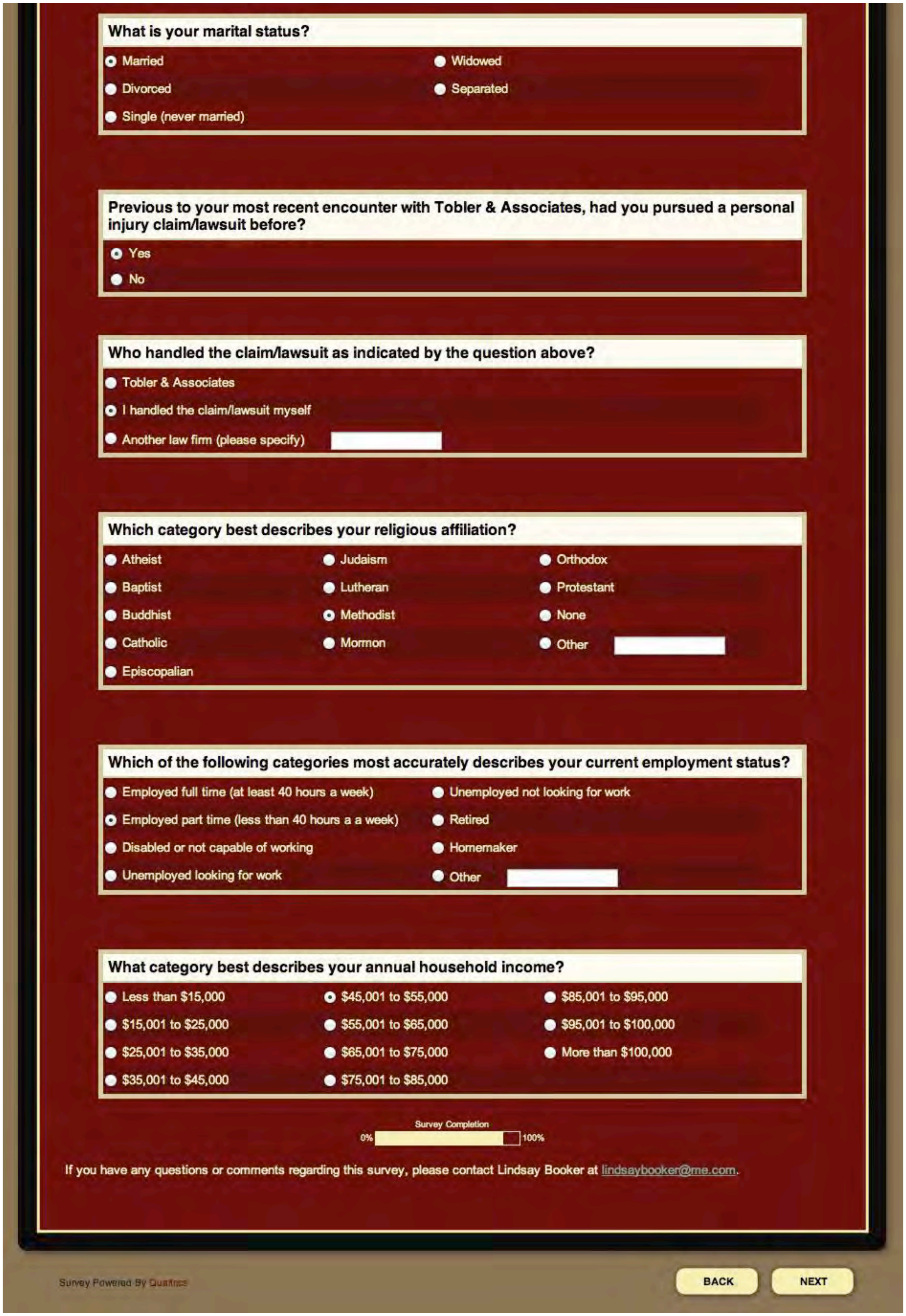
- ( ) Under 18
- (•) 18-25
- ( ) 26-36
- ( ) 36-45
- ( ) 46-65
- ( ) 66 or older

What is your gender?

- ( ) Male
- (•) Female

What is your primary language?

- ( ) English
- (•) Spanish
- ( ) Other



What is your marital status?

- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Single (never married)

Previous to your most recent encounter with Tobler & Associates, had you pursued a personal injury claim/lawsuit before?

- Yes
- No

Who handled the claim/lawsuit as indicated by the question above?

- Tobler & Associates
- I handled the claim/lawsuit myself
- Another law firm (please specify)

Which category best describes your religious affiliation?

- Atheist
- Judaism
- Orthodox
- Baptist
- Lutheran
- Protestant
- Buddhist
- Methodist
- None
- Catholic
- Mormon
- Other
- Episcopalian

Which of the following categories most accurately describes your current employment status?

- Employed full time (at least 40 hours a week)
- Unemployed not looking for work
- Employed part time (less than 40 hours a a week)
- Retired
- Disabled or not capable of working
- Homemaker
- Unemployed looking for work
- Other

What category best describes your annual household income?

- Less than $15,000
- $45,001 to $55,000
- $85,001 to $95,000
- $15,001 to $25,000
- $55,001 to $65,000
- $95,001 to $100,000
- $25,001 to $35,000
- $65,001 to $75,000
- More than $100,000
- $35,001 to $45,000
- $75,001 to $85,000

Survey Completion

0% 100%

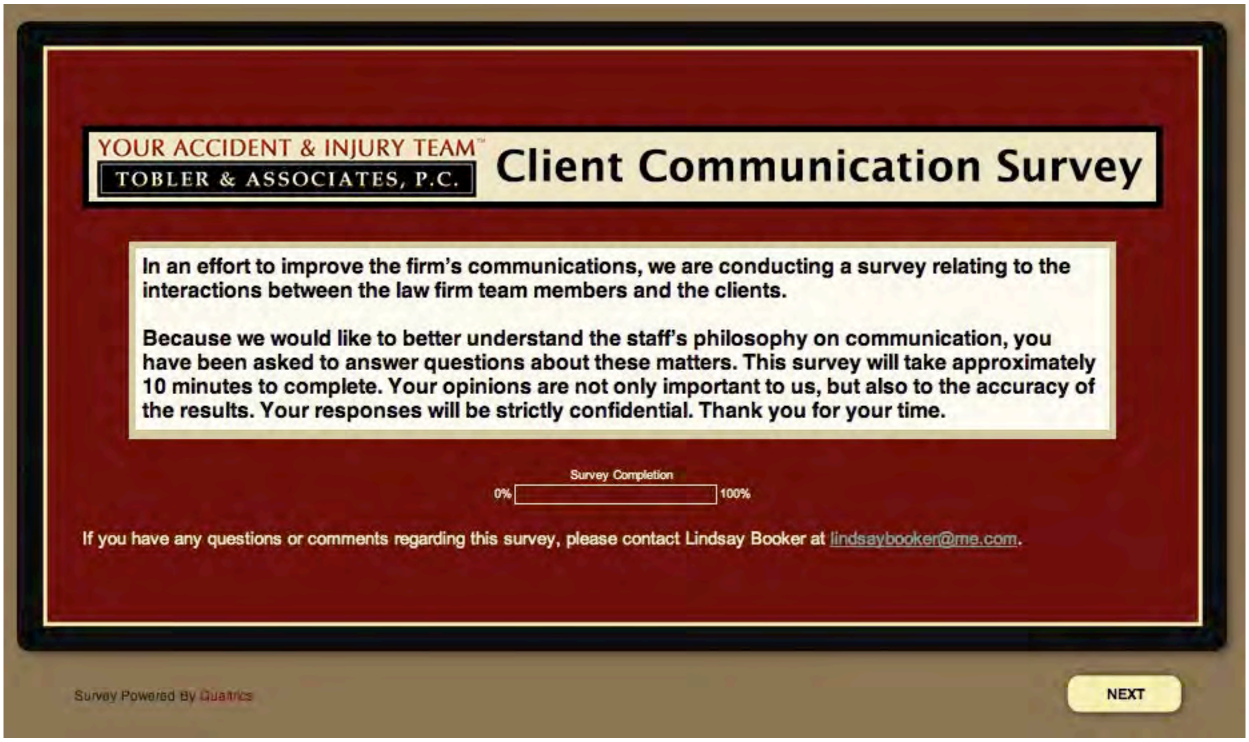
If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

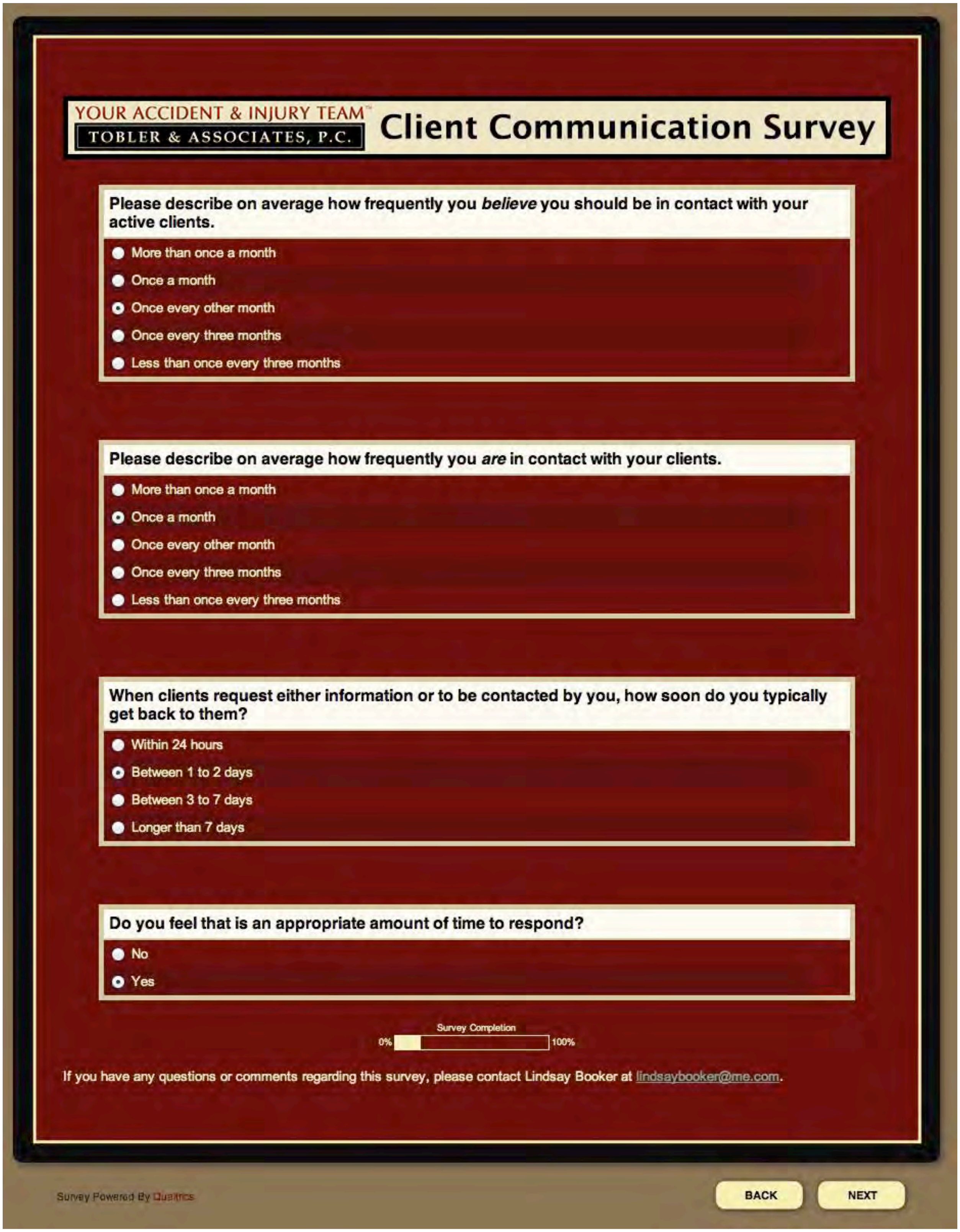
Survey Powered By Qualtrics

BACK NEXT


YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.
Client Communication Survey
THANK YOU
Thank you for participating in our survey. Your opinions are very important to us and we appreciate the time you have spent to assist us in this communications assessment. Your name has now been submitted into the drawing for a $50 Visa gift card. In the event that you win, you will be notified by email.
Sincerely,
Lindsay Booker
Survey Completion
0%
100%
If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Appendix B – Survey for Employees of Tobler & Associates





YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

Please describe on average how frequently you *believe* you should be in contact with your active clients.

- More than once a month
- Once a month
- Once every other month
- Once every three months
- Less than once every three months

Please describe on average how frequently you *are* in contact with your clients.

- More than once a month
- Once a month
- Once every other month
- Once every three months
- Less than once every three months

When clients request either information or to be contacted by you, how soon do you typically get back to them?

- Within 24 hours
- Between 1 to 2 days
- Between 3 to 7 days
- Longer than 7 days

Do you feel that is an appropriate amount of time to respond?

- No
- Yes

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

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TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

Which communication channel(s) do you use to initiate contact with clients? Check all that apply.

- [ ] In-person
- [x] Email
- [ ] Other
- [x] Telephone
- [ ] Paper, letters, or fax

In your communications with the clients, regardless of which party initiated the contact, which channel was used most often?

- [x] In-person
- [x] Email
- [ ] Other
- [ ] Telephone
- [ ] Paper, letters, or fax

Which communication channel do you prefer?

- ( ) In-person
- ( ) Telephone
- (•) Email
- ( ) Paper, letters, or fax
- ( ) Other

Why do you prefer the method of communication you previously selected?

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

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TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

How much information do you feel you share with the clients about their case?

- Excessive
- The right amount
- Not enough

On average, how comfortable are you explaining complex information to clients so that they are able to understand it?

- Very comfortable
- Comfortable
- Neutral
- Uncomfortable
- Very uncomfortable

On average, how frequently do you experience miscommunication between you and the clients?

- More than once a day
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than once a month
- Never

In what form does this miscommunication typically occur? (Check all that apply)

- In-person
- Email
- Other
- Telephone
- Paper, letters, or fax

Does the miscommunication usually resolve in satisfactory way?

- No
- Yes

Please describe how these miscommunications are resolved.

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

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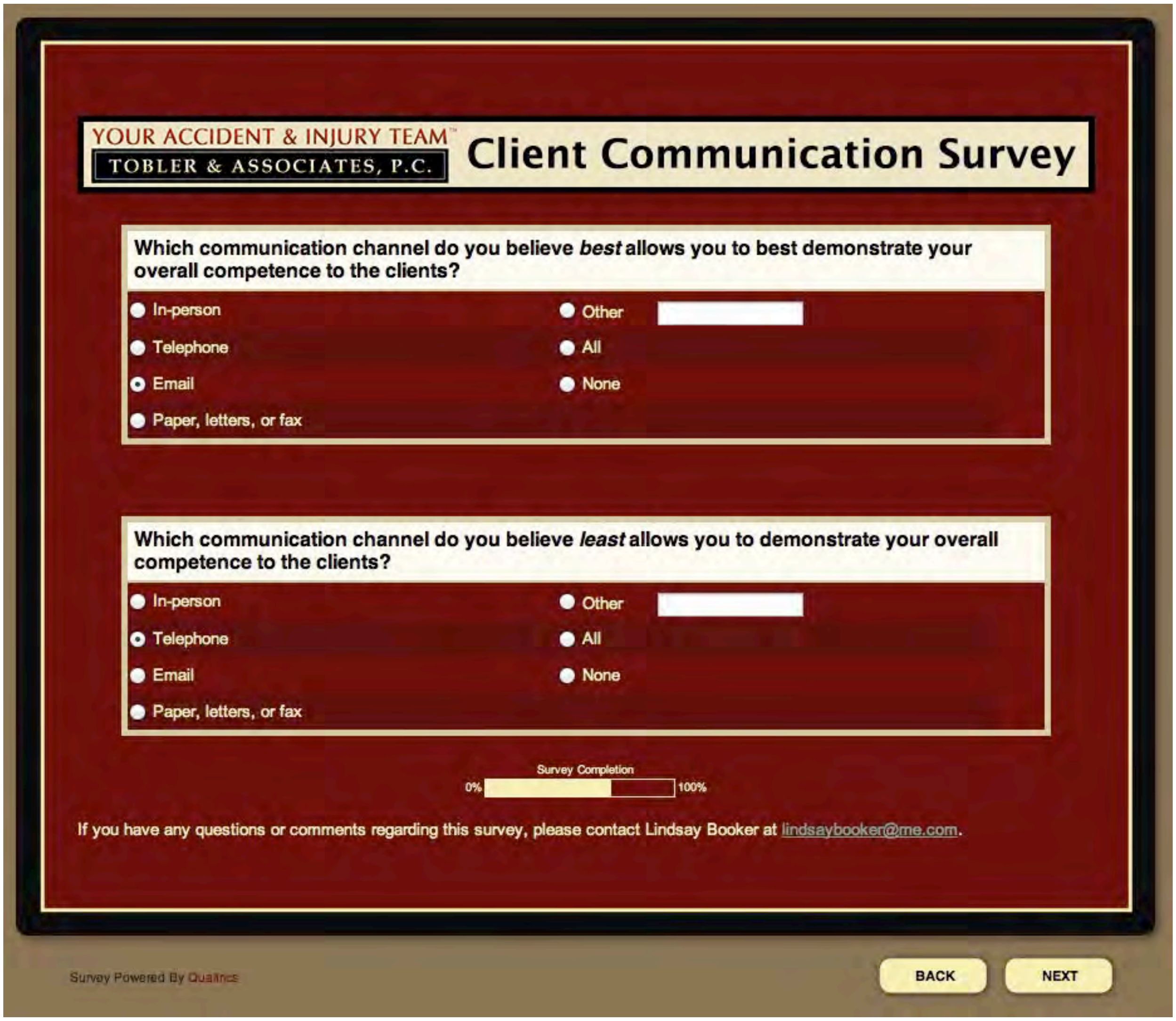
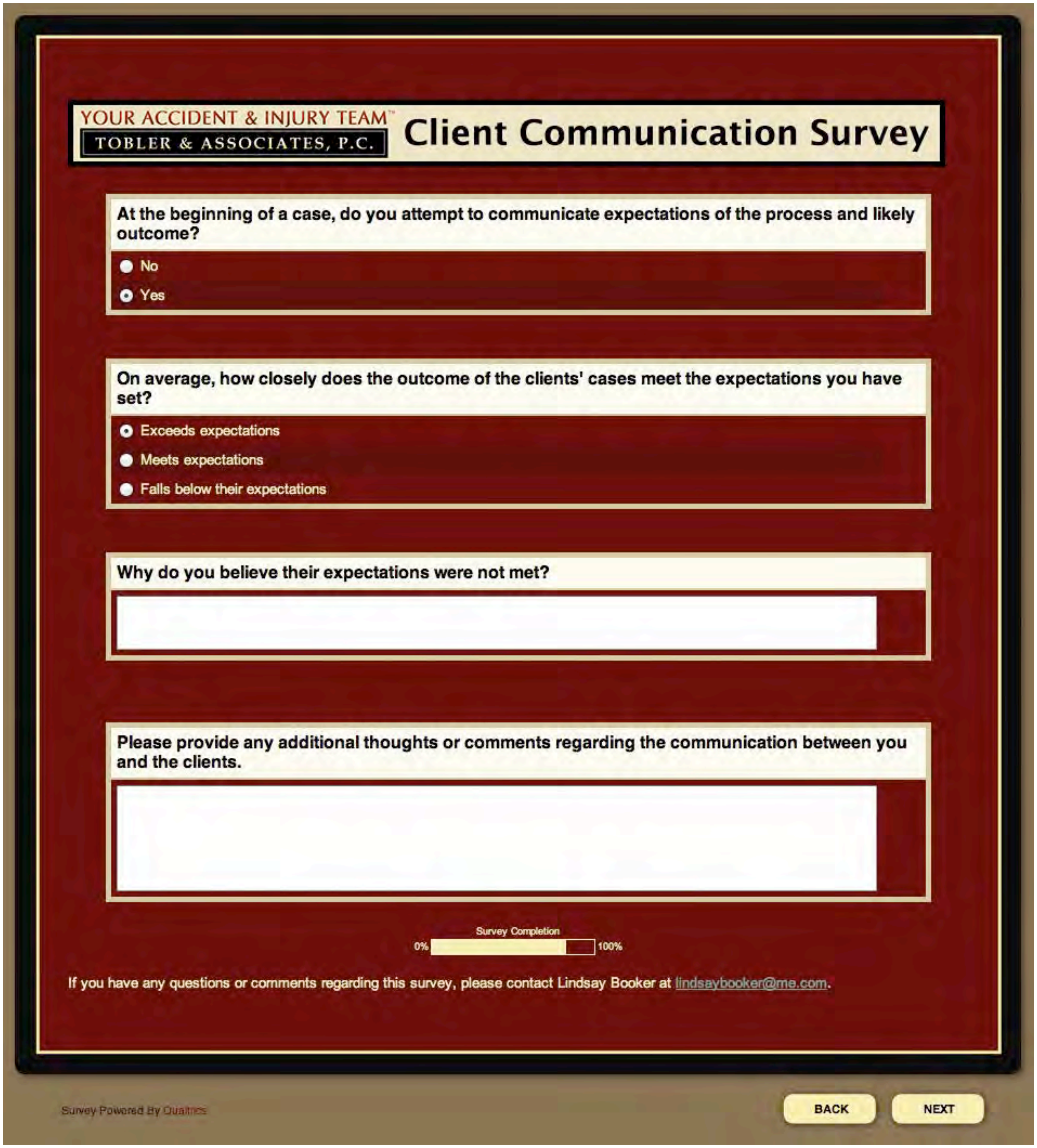

YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.
Client Communication Survey
Which communication channel do you believe *best* allows you to best demonstrate your overall competence to the clients?
In-person
Telephone
Email
Paper, letters, or fax
Other
All
None
Which communication channel do you believe *least* allows you to demonstrate your overall competence to the clients?
In-person
Telephone
Email
Paper, letters, or fax
Other
All
None
Survey Completion
0%
100%
If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.
Survey Powered By Qualtrics
BACK
NEXT



YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Client Communication Survey

At the beginning of a case, do you attempt to communicate expectations of the process and likely outcome?

- No
- Yes

On average, how closely does the outcome of the clients' cases meet the expectations you have set?

- Exceeds expectations
- Meets expectations
- Falls below their expectations

Why do you believe their expectations were not met?

Please provide any additional thoughts or comments regarding the communication between you and the clients.

Survey Completion
0% 100%

If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.

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YOUR ACCIDENT & INJURY TEAM™
TOBLER & ASSOCIATES, P.C.
Client Communication Survey
THANK YOU
Thank you for participating in this survey. Your opinions are very important to us and we appreciate the time you have spent to assist us in this communications assessment.
Sincerely,
Lindsay Booker
Survey Completion
0%
100%
If you have any questions or comments regarding this survey, please contact Lindsay Booker at lindsaybooker@me.com.
Survey Powered By Qualtrics

Appendix C – Client Invitation Email

Dear ${m://FirstName},

Hello, my name is Lindsay Booker and I am working with the law firm of Tobler & Associates. In an effort to improve their communications, we are conducting a survey related to the interactions between the law firm team members and their clients.

You were randomly selected to answer questions about these matters. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your opinions are not only important to us, but also to the accuracy of the results. Your responses will be kept confidential.

All participants who complete the survey will be entered into a drawing for a $50 Visa gift card.

This survey is intended for former clients of Tobler & Associates. If you were a client of Tobler & Associates, please click on the link below to start the survey. If you were not a client of Tobler & Associates, but there is a member of the household who was a client, please provide him/her with the link below. Thank you for your time.

> Follow this link to the Survey:
> ${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}
>
> Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
> ${l://SurveyURL}

Sincerely,
Lindsay Booker
lindsaybooker@me.com

Appendix D – Sample Reminder Email

Dear ${m://FirstName}, We Really Want to Hear From You!

Recently, you received an email from us to complete a survey about your experience with Tobler & Associates. We haven't heard from you yet and would really like your feedback. The survey will only take about 10 minutes to complete, and by doing so, **you will be entered into a drawing for a $50 VISA gift card**!

This survey must be completed by **March 15, 2013** for your responses to be included. In case you lost or deleted the original invitation, we've provided another link to the survey below.

Your responses will not be associated with your personal information and your answers will be kept confidential. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact us.

${l://SurveyLink?d=Click here to start survey!!}
Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: ${l://SurveyURL}

Thank you,
Lindsay Booker
lindsaybooker@me.com

Appendix E – Postcard Solicitation for Survey

Front

Back

Appendix F – Open-Ended Survey Responses

Client: Which communication channel(s) did Tobler & Associates use to contact you? Check all that apply.

Other
Almost never returned my calls

Client: Out of all communications with Tobler & Associates, regardless of who contacted the other, which communication method was most often used?

Other
Depends on what it was for usually by phone or email

Client: Which communication method did you prefer the most?

Other
Usually phone or email

Client: Why do you prefer the method of communication you previously selected?

Preference	Response
Telephone	I was working full-time - it was easier
Telephone	I almost always have my phone on and near me. As where that is not the case with my computer for email contacts.
In-person	The lawyer could explain more to me, in person, because I was able to sit with him and fully understand what was being said, vs on the phone where I might miss something.
Telephone	Offers current information and ability to discuss matters at hand.
In-person	Personal
Telephone	It was the fastest and easiest way to communicate at the time.
Telephone	It works the best for me...
Email	Because of my limited mobility
Telephone	Easier!
Telephone	Easier to get a hold of information
Email	It is convenient for my schedule
Telephone	Easier response...
Telephone	Just to be clear, my case had been handled by Maribel who was terrible about returning phone calls. She simply would not do it. I would call three or four times before a call was returned. She is no longer handling my case and no longer with the company. Now Kimberly is extremely polite and responds in a timely manner. I honestly do not necessarily prefer phone or email except when my internet was gone for about 3 months, I only had access to phone.

Phone/Email	Easy and fast
Telephone	Convenience
Email	Easier
Telephone	The most reliable and convenient way to reach me
Telephone	More accurate info.
Telephone	It was the fastest and most efficient.
Telephone	Because is more faster the communications.
In-person	Because it is easier to transfer and communicate information directly face to face rather than on the phone. It's also easier to understand information being given at times from the Tobler and Associates.
Telephone	Communicating by phone was easier to get my questions answered with clarification and detail. It also assured me the person was aware of the particulars of my case and if not, they agreed to find out, and they did! They were always patient and responsive.
Telephone	I answer the phone more than any other type of communications.
Email	Best way to contact me between 9 to 5 and it is private. Phone calls at work are difficult. In the beginning when I was home than phone calls worked best - since at the time I didn't have a computer.

Employee: Which communication channel do you prefer?

Other
Whatever is the client's preference

Employee: Why do you prefer the method of communication you previously selected?

Text Response
Quick method, I can contact more clients in a short space of time.
I prefer whatever method the client prefers.
I like email communication because it is written, thus there is sure documentation of the communication. Also, i think by putting something in writing it is harder for their to be a misunderstanding. Also, it is a quicker form of communication. I don't have to wait for a call back. And it is to the point.
Quickest
because I can't think about the problems or the questions and take time to craft my response
I feel that the clients have more reassurance when speaking to an actual person that their case is being handled and is valued.

Client: In what form did this miscommunication occur? (Check all that apply) (Question displays if previous question was answered yes)

Other
there was no communication

Employee: Please describe how these miscommunications are resolved. Question displays if question 10. Employee was answered with anything but "never")

Text Response
Explained in layman's terms over the phone.
If there is a big miscommunication or misunderstanding than an in person meeting is appropriate they can be resolved through phone calls/emails too
Telephone calls or in person meetings
I reassess the question that the client is asking and reword my answer to be better understood.

Client: Which method of communication allowed Tobler & Associates to best demonstrate its competence to you?

Other
Some of these questions are difficult to answer since we are just barely getting into the filing process

Employee: Why do you believe their expectations were not met? (Question displays if question 17. Employee was answered "Falls below their expectations".)

Text Response
Many clients have an inflated expectation of what the monetary value of their personal injury claim is.

Client: Please explain why you do not feel that Tobler & Associates representatives did everything they could to maximize your settlement? (Question displays if previous question was answered "no".)

Text Response
My case was bounced around between people. I would have to call 4-5 before i could get anyone on the phone, after almost a year they sent me a letter telling me they were dropping my case & i had only 2 months to try & find another law firm to take my case. So i pretty much just gave up & received nothing for my injuries!!
Took too much time. Pushed my case to back of the list. Failed to request documents on a timely basis. Assistant unfamiliar with my case and did nothing with it until I showed up unannounced to get an update. Acted very uninterested in my "small" case.

Client: Please provide any additional thoughts or comments regarding your experience with the communication between you and Tobler & Associates.

Text Response
My car was totaled by an extreme DUI ASU student from out-of-state. Loren quickly got me a rental vehicle and pursued my case quickly and efficiently.
There were a few things I was told would be done that seemed to fall between the cracks. On one hand, I am grateful my case was accepted and I believe my attorney is a very ethical person. On the other hand, a few forgotten details ended up causing some issues with the case.
They dropped the ball. The first meeting was promising with a plan of action laid out. It went down hill after that. Hard to get in touch with anyone. No continuity and a lot of shuffling. Waited entirely too long, as if they didn't want to handle the case but was unable to gracefully decline until it was too late to pursue any further. Then, it was oh well, I'm sorry. Due to present conditions we cannot continue. I should have left the adjuster of the other party handle everything. At least they would have probably paid all medical expenses and who knows maybe offered some type of compensation. I guess the case wasn't big enough for Tobler and Assoc. Or they got paid off. I just wanted to see justice for the pain and suffering the injured party sustained. There was nothing done to say, "I'm sorry, we were at fault. This is what I would like to do for you." I thought an attorney was to help see that this was done not hinder it.
They were always so helpful and nice. Our case was about 6 or 7 years ago and My husband and I are still grateful for them! I would recommend them to anybody.
Very good experience
All communication with Maren Tobler, Nathan Tobler and Kimberly has been perfect. The only negative issues I experienced were with Maribel who is no longer there. Unfortunately she handled my case for the first two years and it was not a positive experience. Communicating with Maren is always lovely and I am very pleased with the work she has done on my case.
Again, I can't really answer most of the questions because even though this has been ongoing for the last couple of years, Tobler is just barely filing the claim.
Their staff was very caring and supportive through a very difficult time
An honest and competent and professional and passionate and caring team.
I used this firm about 4 years previously. Found them online. Maren was my attorney. Voica was the legal assistant then. She was excellent. She f/u with you constantly, kept you apprised of what was going on, kept you in the loop. The legal assistant and Nathan Jr. acted as if my case was trivial and not important. They failed to write off for records on a timely basis. I came to the office months after they had taken my case. My folder had maybe 2 pieces of paper in it. They had basically done nothing and pushed my file to bottom of the stack. What a waste of my time. Will never return or refer to them!!!!
My experience with your is ok.
Excellent firm to bring "all" parties to a meeting of the minds and accomplish a very satisfying settlement for all parties to the law suit without having to drag it out through a costly trial.
I just appreciate the fact that they were willing to take my case. Trips and Falls as I learned are not easy to settle. The fact that I was able to get a decent settlement was due to this firm.

Employee: Please provide any additional thoughts or comments regarding the communication between you and the clients.

Text Response
Important to explain the process and time expectations in the beginning. Most people are in the dark when it comes to the legal processes.
I would like to see myself and our firm stay more frequently in touch with clients. I would like to set reasonable expectations regarding communications for the clients from the onset of our representation. We have attempted to do this recently. I have asked staff to set up status meetings (just 15 minute phone calls) with the client for every 30 days. I have gotten resistance from the staff on this. But I believe it would be beneficial both to make sure we are following up on the file/client, and it sets expectations for the client, so ideally they aren't calling us every other day asking for a status. With respect to client communications, the 80/20 rule seems to apply. 20% of the clients tend to take up 80% of our communication time.
Presently, it is not in my jurisdiction to communicate case outcome expectations with the clients

Appendix G – Client Survey Participant Demographics

Who was the paralegal that worked on your case? Please check all that apply.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Maribel Buford		8	30%
2	Susan Almquist		4	15%
3	Frankie Jo Jordan		3	11%
4	Suzanne Guerin		0	0%
5	Angel (Hemp) Kriser		0	0%
6	Irene Milsaps		0	0%
7	Voica Ghisoiu		5	19%
8	Laura Nottke		1	4%
9	Kim Hardina		2	7%
10	Kristen Kauffman		1	4%
11	Renee Richey		1	4%
12	Camille Hastings		0	0%
13	Lindsay Robertozzi		1	4%
14	Mathias Cicotte		0	0%
15	Jonathan Miller		0	0%
16	Other		7	26%

Other
I don't remember
don't remember
dont remember it was someone who took over
several
Kimberly Birdsong
Don't remember

Who was the attorney that worked on your case? Please check all that apply.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Maren Tobler Hansen		12	43%
2	Lorin Tobler		11	39%
3	Nathan Tobler		15	54%
4	Paul Duda		0	0%
5	Michael Cutchen		1	4%

What was your age when you hired Tobler & Associates?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Under 18		0	0%
2	18-25		4	14%
3	26-36		2	7%
4	36-45		6	21%
5	46-65		14	50%
6	66 or older		2	7%
	Total		28	100%

What is your gender?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Male		10	36%
2	Female		18	64%
	Total		28	100%

What is your primary language?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	English		27	96%
2	Spanish		0	0%
3	Other		1	4%
	Total		28	100%

Other
German

What is your marital status?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Married		17	61%
2	Divorced		6	21%
3	Single (never married)		4	14%
4	Widowed		0	0%
5	Separated		1	4%
	Total		28	100%

Previous to your most recent encounter with Tobler & Associates, had you pursued a personal injury claim/lawsuit before?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		7	26%
2	No		20	74%
	Total		27	100%

Who handled the claim/lawsuit as indicated by the question above?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Tobler & Associates		3	43%
2	I handled the claim/lawsuit myself		0	0%
3	Another law firm (please specify)		4	57%
	Total		7	100%

Another law firm (please specify)
Jacoby & Myers
Hastings and Hastings
Kansas
Don't Remember

Which category best describes your religious affiliation?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Atheist		0	0%
2	Baptist		1	4%
3	Buddhist		1	4%
4	Catholic		7	26%
5	Episcopalian		0	0%
6	Judaism		0	0%
7	Lutheran		1	4%
8	Methodist		2	7%
9	Mormon		2	7%
10	Orthodox		1	4%
11	Protestant		3	11%
12	None		2	7%
13	Other		7	26%
	Total		27	100%

Other
Non-Denominational
LDS
Christian
Non-Denominational
Christian

Which of the following categories most accurately describes your current employment status?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Employed full time (at least 40 hours a week)		12	43%
2	Employed part time (less than 40 hours a week)		2	7%
3	Disabled or not capable of working		5	18%
4	Unemployed looking for work		2	7%
5	Unemployed not looking for work		0	0%
6	Retired		3	11%
7	Homemaker		2	7%
8	Other		2	7%
	Total		28	100%

Other
Student
Unemployed, but would like to go back to work once I don't have so many doctors appointments, etc.

What category best describes your annual household income?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Less than $15,000		4	15%
2	$15,001 to $25,000		3	11%
3	$25,001 to $35,000		3	11%
4	$35,001 to $45,000		4	15%
5	$45,001 to $55,000		4	15%
6	$55,001 to $65,000		2	7%
7	$65,001 to $75,000		3	11%
8	$75,001 to $85,000		1	4%
9	$85,001 to $95,000		0	0%
10	$95,001 to $100,000		0	0%
11	More than $100,000		3	11%
	Total		27	100%