

Tips on How to be a Responsible Client

The goal of this page is to provide you with inside tips from attorneys themselves on how you can assist them with your legal matter, and therefore, increase your chances of having a positive experience in the legal system. These tips might even save you some money.

Be smart and efficient when calling your attorney. Depending on the type of case, many attorneys bill on an hourly basis and charge a minimum for the work they do on your case. For example, if you call your attorney and ask him or her what time your court hearing is and the phone conversation lasts less than one minute, you will be billed for six (6) minutes because the attorney will charge a .1 of an hour for the call. You should try to ask his or her secretary a question such as that. Save calls to your attorney for legal advice and discussion. Also, if your legal question is not pressing, then wait until you have 2 or 3 questions to ask your attorney, and then place the call.

Don't confuse your attorney with your psychologist. The hourly rate for an attorney is generally much higher than that of a psychologist; if you need to discuss your emotions, then call a psychologist. If you need to discuss the legal aspects of your case, then call your attorney.

DO NOT LIE. If you lie, you undoubtedly will be caught lying and then the Court will not believe anything you say.

Do not communicate with your attorney through your work email address. Your employer has the right to read all of your emails through your work email address; this could negate your attorney client privilege. (And DEFINITELY do not use your work email address if your litigation involves your employer for whom you are still working!)

Do not ever forward any emails from your attorney to anyone else. This will eliminate your attorney client privilege.

Discovery is one of most expensive parts of any litigation. If your attorney asks you for a document, get it for him or her. Don't ask why; don't explain why you do not have it - just get the document and get it to your attorney. If you have any doubts about whether or not your attorney needs a certain document, give it to your attorney and let them make that decision.

PROOFREAD your email—If you are sending an email to someone associated or involved with your case (even to your attorney) - PROOFREAD your email first, and always double check who you are sending it to.

Call if you cannot make an appointment—If you make an appointment to see a lawyer and can't keep it, please call to reschedule or cancel so that someone else can have that time slot. Most attorneys schedule their time very carefully, and only have enough time and staff to manage things that have been scheduled in advance.

Avoid dropping by without an appointment—By the same token, you should try to avoid dropping in without an appointment if you can help it. Attorneys understand that things can pop up unexpectedly or that you might be in the neighborhood and just need to drop something off, and they can often deal with things on short notice if the matter is small and quick or if he/she isn't particularly busy at the moment. However, many attorneys spend a great deal of their time in court or out in the field or might already be in conference with a client or even involved in a trial that could last days or even weeks on end. So please understand that while your attorney should respond promptly if he/she is available, there are times when he/she has to focus on one thing for days at a time, so he/she can't always respond on short notice.

Make certain that your attorney always has your current contact information. If you move, change your phone number, or get a new email address, let your attorney know right away. Sometimes he/she will need to get in touch with you right away and might not have time to write a letter, especially if he/she can't be certain that the letter will reach you within the next few days.

Carefully read all materials given to you by your attorney. If you receive a letter or any sort of written instructions from your attorney, please read it promptly, thoroughly, and carefully. Do not assume that it is just a standard form that is sent to everyone. If an attorney has taken the time to write something for you to read, it is either something that applies directly to you, or it is something that needs to be considered in every case like yours, so please take it seriously.

Do not make any decisions that have anything to do with something that your attorney is handling, or that even might have some minor effect on your case, without first consulting with your attorney. Something that might seem obvious or irrelevant to you could turn out to be more important to your case than you realize. The last thing that you want to hear is that your case has been damaged by something that you considered to be a minor decision, when it would have only taken a few minutes to call your attorney's office or to send an email to him or her.

While it is true that attorneys are often very busy, you have a right to know what is going on in your case, and you should be reasonably confident that your attorney is taking the proper actions on your behalf. Don't be shy about calling or sending emails to your attorney and to his or her staff.