

## HOW TO WORK WITH A LAWYER - AND HAVE HIM WORK FOR YOU

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Lawyers are a lot like doctors -- it is best to have one ready rather than to have to find one in an emergency. And cooperating with your lawyer, by being completely honest and providing as much information as possible, can help as much as it can with your family physician at check-up time.

Legal fees, the dark cloud looming over every client's head, must be understood before taking any action with an attorney. Make sure you know what the hourly rate or fee will be for his various functions, and let him know your financial limits. Discuss your goals regarding your case, and determine if your attorney can accomplish them within your budget. Generally, the more adversarial you want to be, the more it will cost.

This done, be as much help as possible to your attorney. How? Take care of details yourself. Organize all your paperwork -- invoices, statements, contracts, etc. -- that pertain to the case. Supply your lawyer with as much information as possible. This will keep the bill lower.

Draw up a list of questions you have about the case, and ask them all at once during a meeting. Remember that follow-up phone calls to ask new questions will result in less efficiency and higher bills. A rule of thumb: It's a bad idea to call your lawyer at home to discuss a

question that just came to you -- chances are, he won't have your files nearby, and won't be able to remember all the details about your case. But he will probably bill you for the time spent with you on the phone -- especially if you're cutting into his free time. When you think about it, it's like calling your doctor at home on Sunday afternoon and asking him when you need to get your next measles shot.

The idea is to make it easy for your lawyer to handle your case. It's hard enough for him to fight for your rights without having to wrangle valuable information from you, or struggle to get in touch with you. Make sure your attorney has all your phone numbers -- home, office, and car.

The hardest way to begin a legal battle is to have to find a new attorney and introduce him to you and your case. Have one ready to go to work for you at any time. Someone you feel comfortable with. Not only will he be able to start the proceedings quickly and smoothly, but he will probably agree to bill you for his services. On the other hand, a new lawyer may require a retainer up front -- and that may be the most inopportune time for you to be raising cash.

In short, be prepared to send your lawyer into action, and arm him well with everything you can muster. Understand how he operates and charges. Then sit back and let him do his job.