



The National Self-Represented Litigants Project East gratefully acknowledges funding from the Law Foundation of Ontario



10 Tips for a Cost-Effective Lawyer-Client Relationship

HERE ARE 10 TIPS THAT TOGETHER, CAN SAVE YOU THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN LEGAL FEES

- Use legal services wisely**
Keep in mind that every time you contact your lawyer, he or she has to bill you for it. Even a simple emailed question and answer can cost \$20 or more. Phone tag can also get expensive – book a phone appointment instead. Try to enhance your knowledge of basic legal information using reliable community and online sources. Contact your lawyer’s assistant for updates and specific questions about your case that don’t involve legal advice. Use your lawyer for legal advice and representation.
- Talk with your lawyer about costs**
Talk with your lawyer early on about the estimated total cost of each option and rule out any options that are beyond your means. If you can’t afford full representation for your entire case, ask your lawyer to help you figure out how to maximize the resources you do have (for example with a limited scope retainer). Running out of money in the middle of a lawsuit can mean the money you did spend is wasted. This was one of the top complaints of self-represented litigants who previously had a lawyer.
- Talk with your lawyer about expectations**
Talk with your lawyer early on about what would represent a positive outcome for you. If your expectations are not realistic, the lawyer can let you know before you’ve spent a lot of time, effort and money. For example, in many wrongful dismissal situations, it simply isn’t possible to get your job back.
- Request monthly bills**
Ask your lawyer to bill you monthly if your bill exceeds a certain minimum amount (say, \$250), even if you’ve provided a retainer. That way if you find your legal fees are getting to be more than you can afford, you can talk about it with your lawyer promptly and make a plan to deal with it. It will also alert you if you have developed expensive habits – like frequently calling or emailing your lawyer when it isn’t necessary.
- Seek emotional support elsewhere**
Your lawyer is not, and cannot be, your therapist. If you need emotional support as you move through the legal process, you should see a therapist or rely on a trusted friend or family member.
- Be prepared**
Make sure you are prepared for every meeting with your lawyer. Make notes about the questions you want to ask. Get back to your lawyer promptly when she asks for information.
- Stay organized**
When you provide documents to your lawyer, always organize them first (e.g. by type, then chronological). If you’re not sure how your lawyer wants them organized, ask.
- Just ask!**
Ask your lawyer what else you can do to keep your legal fees down. This will vary from case to case, but there is almost always something you can do.
- Consider phone appointments**
If you do need legal advice, phone appointments with your lawyer are almost always faster (and therefore cheaper) than in-person meetings. Important meetings should still take place in person.
- Check with your accountant**
Some legal fees are tax deductible. Check with your lawyer or accountant to see if any of the fees in your matter are tax deductible.