

Posted on Sun, Apr. 16, 2006

Time is money

Dealing successfully with a divorce attorney

Dealing with divorce and divorce lawyers is not much different than taking a trip without first plotting out the route. If you go to a matrimonial lawyer without specific objectives or goals in mind, and think he or she can fix it for you, you'll be **disappointed**. Given a specific set of facts, lawyers are trained to apply the law and advise clients about ways to attain specific goals -- or at least some of them. Here are some basic guidelines:

1. Gather as much of your financial and other information as possible before you go to see your lawyer. This includes tax returns and schedules, financial statements, budget documents and the like from at least the last five years.
2. Make sure your fee arrangement is in writing, that you understand it before you sign, and that everyone understands how you will pay your bill. Generally, lawyers are not allowed to take a percentage of what is recovered for you in a divorce case, so expect to pay by the hour.
3. Since you won't always need to talk to your lawyer when you have questions, meet and get to know the paralegal or secretary so you can give and get information billed at lower rates.
4. Write out your questions, then make an appointment with the lawyer and take notes about what you're told.
5. If there are billing questions, talk to the billing clerk or the secretary who handles this aspect of the business. The **lawyer should** be the last **resort**.
6. **Photocopies made at the lawyer's office** may **cost you** 25 or more cents per page, sometimes plus the time of the person making the copies. So for numerous copies, consider making your own at copy shops to save money.
7. **If you don't understand something, ask. And if you have a problem with the way your lawyer is handling your case, also ask. Don't allow the issue to fester.**
8. Your lawyer should keep you reasonably informed about the status of your case by sending you copies of what goes out of the office. Then you'll be less likely to make emergency calls. Remember: **Spur-of-the-moment** calls just to find out what's going on can get expensive.
9. Don't second-guess your lawyer based on the advice of friends and family. But if you feel strongly about a point, seek a second opinion. Let your lawyer know you feel this way.
10. Remember that your lawyer works for you. After you have been fully informed and have reviewed your options, you and your lawyer should decide upon a course of action suitable to your situation.
11. Don't be surprised if your case takes time to get resolved. Although everyone is in a hurry to complete his/her case, you will have no control over scheduling issues that can keep your case in limbo for a long time.
12. If your lawyer promises or guarantees you a result, get **another lawyer**.

-- Jan Collins, a writer and editor, and Jan Warner, matrimonial, tax and elder-law attorney.