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Take It From A PRO

HOW TO BE YOUR ATTORNEY'S BEST ASSET

BY LUWANNA BROWN -- ATTORNEY

In the previous article that I wrote, which was published in the very first edition of the Business Pros newspaper, I wrote about the times in a person's life when having an attorney, or at the very least, having an idea where a good lawyer may be found, can be a valuable asset. In this article I will attempt to tell you, from a lawyer's perspective, how clients can be valuable assets to attorneys. I know that may sound a bit strange, but just like there is such a thing as a good or bad attorney, there is such a thing as a good or bad client. Similar to the client who finds that attorney that he or she is very comfortable with handling their legal matters, we attorneys do find it refreshing when we come across a "good client" whom we trust and do find ourselves bragging to other attorneys about.

10 Ways to be a Good Client

1. Promptly respond. Timely respond to any and all requests that your attorney may have for information, phone calls, or documents.

2. Be available. Sometimes, the practice of law moves at a fast pace and your justice is sometimes

only a phone call away. It is a great idea to make sure you and your attorney have multiple ways to contact one another and that you prearrange your schedule to accommodate your appearance for court dates or hearings.

3. Always be honest. Give your attorney full disclosure of both favorable and unfavorable information regarding your case (the good, the bad, and the ugly). This allows the attorney to be prepared for anything and take a preemptive blow to any thing produced by your adversary that could potentially damage your case, embarrass you or your attorney, or worse—result in the attorney prematurely withdrawing from your case (and with just cause). FYI: if your legal matter is murder, please don't tell your attorney that you committed the offense!!! Not only does this prejudice the attorney's ability to defend you, it may also ultimately result in the attorney having to withdraw from your case.

4. Keep a journal. In detail, keep an account of all the events that led up to your legal matter and all events that occurred subsequent to that, including the names, phone numbers

and dates you spoke with persons who have vital information. Remember that you are the person having the most knowledge about your matter and because we are human, our memory has a tendency to fade over time. This journal can be used later as a tool to jog your memory and as mental impressions, usually cannot be discovered or requested by your adversary.

5. Remember that the Attorney is Human Also. No one is perfect.

6. Seeing is believing. In the case of damages, a picture is worth a thousand words, so please take plenty of them, make duplicate copies, store to a compact disk, and make sure the images or photos are stored in a safe place. For the same reason, it is important that you also keep any and all receipts.

7. Be an Investigator. Soak up all the knowledge you can from any source that you can that relates to your legal matter or about your adversary.

8. Don't Cheat. It is common practice for attorneys (especially the "good" ones) to advise clients to seek a second legal opinion regarding the legal advice that he or she has given,

and it is probably a good idea. However, once you have retained or signed a contract with an attorney, it is a really bad idea to be constantly going behind your attorney's back seeking the advice of other attorneys, unless you believe your attorney has done something unethical. Not only does this kind of "cheating" result in undermining your case and your attorney's ability to assist you, the other attorneys may be liable for interference of contract.

9. Keep copies of everything. Every time that you must sign or agree to anything that may be of importance to you in the future or has grave consequences (such as a promissory note) it is absolutely necessary, and sometimes required by law, for you to have copies of these documents. Copies of these documents, or lack thereof, have huge implications for your legal matter.

10. Have realistic expectations! I CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH. Be upfront with your attorney as to whether or not you expect a certain or specific result from his or her legal assistance and most attorneys will promptly tell you if he or she can or cannot get you

that result or if what you are seeking cannot legally be obtained. Listen to what the attorney tells you regarding the likely outcomes of your legal matter—remember that though the attorney is not a psychic, the attorney is an expert and the ability to predict with relative certainty how a legal matter will come out, is what the legal profession is all about. If what the attorney is offering you is not what you want, do not hire him or her. Most dissatisfied clients would probably agree that either (a) they did not tell the attorney what was expected of the legal service or (b) they were somehow unwilling to believe it when the attorney told them that they were fighting an uphill battle, and would more than likely be unsuccessful.

As previously stated, you are usually your attorney's best asset, so take care of yourself. In conclusion, from a lawyer's perspective: Filing a lawsuit: \$300.00, Cost of legal fees: \$5000.00, finding a client that you know will appreciate the hundreds of hours that were spent on working their case: PRICELE\$\$!!