

5 tips to motivate your fellow attorneys to bill their hours on time

If you are a supervising attorney or administrative manager at a law firm, no doubt one of your biggest headaches is getting your firm's attorneys to input their billable hours on time. It should go without saying that hours that are not timely input result in all kinds of problems for the firm:

- Hours are forgotten and thus cannot be billed
- Hours are billed late and a client refuses to pay when they show up on a later bill
- An attorney's memory of the actual time spent and activities completed grows hazy, leading to inaccurate or incomplete entries the client refuses to pay

Younger associates often get the blame for poor time entry, but we all know that senior attorneys and partners can be some of the worst offenders, as they might have a less of a fear of reprisal from those attorneys and administrators tasked with organizing, reviewing, and sending out the bills. So how can you motivate your fellow attorneys to bill their hours on time? Here are 5 tips.

Give Out Gift Cards on a Monthly Basis for On-time Billers

You can incentivize those who consistently input their time on a timely basis (which can be on a daily basis or a weekly basis) by handing out gift cards to those associates and partners. A \$15 Starbucks gift card can mean a lot more to a hard-working attorney than \$15 cash, and the sight of you walking around the office handing out the cards can put some healthy peer

pressure on those who are not receiving the gift cards to join the club by getting their hours in on time.

Organize a Catered Lunch Contingent on Everyone Submitting Their Hours on Time

Taking the incentive approach a step further, you can have a free monthly lunch catered by a local favorite (sushi, Mexican, pizza, whatever the office favorite is) to reward on-time billing, but the catch is that you will only have the monthly lunch if everyone gets their hours in on time. An attorney who may not get his act together for a gift card may do so if his failure results in all the other attorneys looking at him as the reason that they don't get a free Chipotle lunch this month.

Send Out a Firm-wide Email With the List of Late Billers

You can make the shaming a little more explicit by sending out an email to all the lawyers with a list of those attorneys who have failed to properly input their time. Harsh? Maybe, but so is causing the firm to lose thousands of dollars a month in billables because a handful of lawyers are not honoring their obligation to the firm to simply input their hours on time. If you want to be a little more gentle, you can circulate a list of people who do bill their hours on time.

Fine Attorneys Who Bill Late

It may sound unusual, but plenty of firms take the approach of simply imposing monetary fines on attorneys who do not bill on time, especially for partners. Again, the other partners are all losing money due to late billing (and, by extension, the bonuses and job security of the associates are also damaged) so why not take financial actions in return?

Have a One-on-One Talk with Late Billers

Lastly (or firstly if this is more your style), you can always just have a direct conversation with the offender. There should be no hesitation in taking this step; again, it is the firm that is suffering and so it is entirely appropriate to

sit down with the attorney to talk about this vitally important issue. Talk about ways you can help make the process easier. If the attorney is not familiar with automated options to make billing easier such as remote entry via a tablet or mobile phone, walk him or her through that process.

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