Common Law Firm Complaints and Administrative Tools for Prevention

When you work with the public, an occasional complaint is almost inevitable. It is extremely difficult to please everyone all of the time. Unfortunately, legal professionals receive more than their fair share of client complaints. The public expects a lot from attorneys and, when they become dissatisfied, they are not afraid to make their complaints known.

The American Bar Association (ABA) publishes a list of the most common legal malpractice claims. Many of the items on the list can be grouped together into common complaints, often stemming from administrative inefficiencies. This post will examine some of those complaints and explore administrative processes that can help keep your clients happy.

Unmet expectations

When clients retain the services of an attorney, they often do so with extremely high expectations. Whether they are facing criminal charges, ending a marriage, or entering a lucrative business deal, they envision a positive outcome that benefits their interests. Yet, even the most skilled legal representation cannot guarantee a win in every situation. Any lawyer knows that there will be victories and there will be losses. Unfortunately, those losses may sometimes turn into complaints.

The ABA constantly posts articles and seminars about the importance of professional development in the practice of law. They encourage lawyers to stay knowledgeable about changes in their practice areas and to keep current on their CLEs. That way, when unmet expectations result in

complaints, you can confidently declare that you provided your client with effective legal representation.

Create a CLE tracking system within your firm, so you can always stay informed and up-to-date on CLE requirements and courses relevant to your practice areas.

Failure to communicate

An extremely common complaint involves a lack of communication from the attorney to client. When phone calls are not returned, and emails go unanswered, clients feel that they are being ignored and may assume that you are not actively working on their case.

This is one complaint that is easily avoided. Put a system in place to return telephone calls and emails on a regular basis. If it's a question that can be answered by a support staff member, then delegate the task. Otherwise, set aside a particular time each day when you handle client communications.

Another tool for ensuring adequate client communication is a client portal, such as the one offered through TimeSolv's legal time tracking and billing platform. With this tool, clients can independently log into the portal to view work completed on their case. It saves your firm valuable time while keeping your clients informed.

Fee disputes

Fee disputes can arise from a variety of situations. Here are two common scenarios and how they can be prevented:

- Sending inaccurate Invoices is a quick way to gain complaints and lose satisfied clients. Make sure your invoices accurately reflect the work completed on each client's case. This starts with an efficient time tracking system, like the one offered by TimeSolv. It continues with a

legal billing system that allows your support staff to quickly input tracked time into customizable, accurate invoices.

- No one likes to be hit with unexpected expenses. That's why it's important to provide each client with a complete view of what their matter will cost. Fixed fee billing can be extremely useful in this regard. Not only does it provide your clients with a set price for your services, but it also forces you to work efficiently on the case.

Procrastination

Procrastination is in no way specific to the legal profession, but it can be particularly harmful when it causes lawyers to miss strict deadlines. Dealing with procrastination is largely about mental fortitude, but there are some strategies you can employ to help you through.

You have probably heard the phrase "eat the frog." It comes from a Mark Twain quote and refers to the act of doing your most unpleasant task first thing in the morning, so you can enjoy the remainder of your day. It makes sense, especially considering the fact that procrastination often centers around undesirable tasks.

With this strategy in mind, create a to-do list each morning or every evening. This way you can clearly prioritize your responsibilities and what needs to be done. It may feel like a nuisance but taking a few minutes to rank your tasks can help you be more productive each day.

Once you decide how to tackle your tasks, commit to getting them done. Don't let the telephone or other non-essential matters distract you. Stay focused on each task you are trying to complete, so you can finish them and move on to next item on your to-do list.

Lost documents

Client files can get pretty crowded. From pleadings and answers to supporting documents and evidentiary data – a lot goes into maintaining a

complete client file. For various reasons, these documents may get lost or destroyed in transit to and from the office. When this happens, it can have negative implications for a client's case and lead to a complaint.

To run an effective law firm, you must employ a document management system. It is simply not enough to shove individual sheets of paper into already crowded files. There are numerous tools available to help you with this task. You may decide to use a legal project management system that allows you to log documents into a system once received. You may also consider going completely paperless so that all documents are turned into electronic data and stored within a cloud-based system for safe keeping.

TimeSolv has a feature that is extremely useful when creating a paperless office. Its document management system allows you to store documents within their storage cloud, organizing them by matters or project.

Implement these administrative tools and strategies to keep your law firm running effectively and your clients satisfied. To learn more about the features offered by TimeSolv, click here for a free trial.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, The Legal Writing Studio, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to TimeSolv and a variety of other publications.