Timekeeping Compliance Tips Every Attorney Should Follow

As an attorney, using the words "compliant" and "time tracking" in the same sentence is probably one of the fastest ways to make your eyes glaze over. If compliant time tracking seems downright mythical at your law firm, you're not alone.

This is because on its own, the word "compliance" tends to lead to more questions than answers.

"Compliant with what?"

And with a full load of client work to keep up with, a great many attorneys view timekeeping—compliant or not—as a waste of time.

"I have real work to do."

If you're encouraging your team to [adopt better time-tracking habits](#), but your firm lacked a formal timekeeping policy in the past, expect to be met with even more resistance.

"Why bother?" "Why now?"

Even if it *isn't* going to pique the attention of your legal team any time soon, compliant time tracking is more important than you realize. Fortunately, improving the way your entire firm tracks and bills for time is possible—and it can even be easy.

The risks of non-compliant time tracking

Poor timekeeping habits place burdens on clients and co-workers alike. When you explain these burdens using relatable terms and concrete examples, your team will be more willing to adopt new practices. After all, most attorneys avoid the task out of misunderstanding, not malice.

Overbilling

More money is a good thing—unless it's acquired unethically. And attorneys have a duty to protect clients' best interests, even at their own expense.

Breaking that commitment by overbilling can lead to devastating results, from compromising your law firm's reputation to risking permanent disbarment, whether the upcharges are intentional or not.

To be safe, always be prepared to provide a detailed record of the time spent on every client's legal matter in the event that an invoice is questioned.

Underbilling

Waiting hours, or even days, after the fact to enter time makes it difficult for attorneys to recall just exactly how long they spent on an impromptu lunch meeting or surprise client email.

While reconstructing the timeline, most tend to err on the side of caution to avoid overbilling. However, underbilling is just as risky to a firm's longevity. Shaving fifteen minutes here and five minutes there off of the day's billable hours adds up, cutting into profits that could otherwise be spent on growing your firm.

Dwindling non-billable hours

Doing a little detective work to fill out a timesheet may seem harmless, but it distracts attorneys from equally important duties.

The time attorneys spend compensating for ineffective time-tracking practices has to come from *somewhere*. And because client matters involve a high level of accountability and communication, other non-billable tasks like trust accounting or marketing tend to take the hit.

Billing blunders

Inefficient and disorganized timekeeping practices jeopardize your law firm's entire billing process. When every attorney uses their own unique form of shorthand to track tasks, the billing process can become drawn out and tedious.

If administrators at your firm must frequently track down attorneys to clarify time entries, odds are that your time-tracking policy lacks guidance about legal billing codes.

Adopting [standardized billing codes improves the time tracking and billing processes](#) for everyone involved. Even your clients will appreciate the switch, because they'll receive more timely and accurate bills.

A bad reputation

If effective timekeeping leads to better business decisions and a more consistent billing process, then it's easy to guess what happens without it.

Clients want to know what to expect from your firm and when. When invoices aren't sent at a consistent cadence and don't seem to charge consistent rates for seemingly similar services, clients will lose trust in your firm.

They may also lose confidence in contacting you with pertinent case information, which can lead to fewer favourable rulings over time.

Poorer collection rates

It's easy to justify putting off a bill that is confusing or maybe even inaccurate—but sending invoices soon after work is completed increases the likelihood that your clients will remember your excellent service. When your clients understand what they're paying for, they'll pay for it more quickly.

Using [standardized billing codes makes invoices more detailed](#), so clients understand exactly what you're charging them for. Plus, if you provide legal services to large organizations or businesses, your clients' accountants expect to see standardized billing codes on your invoices.

What you don't know can't help you

If you hope to see your law firm grow in the future, you need to know where your resources—including time—are flowing now.

Compliance leads to standardized data, which in turn illuminates opportunities to streamline workflows and drive firm growth. With the numbers on your side, it's effortless to determine:

- Which practice areas or legal tasks are most profitable
- Whether certain clients are unjustifiably unprofitable
- Which partner, paralegal, or associate is the most efficient, and whether they have pointers to share
- How much time is spent on marketing or hardware maintenance month, and whether it could be more profitable to outsource those functions

When the decisions you make for your law firm are data-driven, you're more likely to see positive results.

Improving your timekeeping practices

With the right tools and strategies on your side, you can adopt compliant timekeeping practices with minimal interruption to legal work.

Try these helpful timekeeping improvement strategies:

Avoid multitasking

Over time, doing a lot at once translates to doing less altogether. In fact, studies show that it takes nearly ten minutes to refocus after [shifting between unrelated tasks](#) at work.

At that rate, blocking time and grouping similar tasks together could easily save an hour of billable time in a single workday.

Take advantage of technology

Jotting down your work by hand is inefficient and often leads to inaccurate invoices—so why not leave those sticky notes in the drawer and give [timekeeping software](#) a try?

From automated client pre-screening to allowing clients to sign documents online, modern legal technology makes attorneys' jobs easier. Legal-specific timekeeping software is no exception, with a plethora of the features your firm needs most:

- Multiple timers to track tasks
- Filters to view hours by day, week, and month
- Budgets to limit how many hours can be billed for individual tasks

- Time entry analytics for each individual timekeeper
- Syncing on and offline
- Custom abbreviations to keep your whole firm consistent

Standardize shorthand

Imagine trying to find the grand total of time your law firm spends on client intake, only to be met with three different names for the same task! (Maybe you don't need to imagine it.)

One-of-a-kind shorthand and other customizations make analyzing data about the time your firm tracks nearly impossible. When you use proper legal codes, you can easily filter tracked time by client and timekeeper to gain the insights you're looking for.

Track time in real-time

Procrastination is the enemy of precision. When attorneys fail to enter the hours they work as they work them, the accuracy of tracked time declines. The longer the interval between the work and the time entry, the less likely it is that the client's invoice will be accurate.

This leads to overall problems with cash flow, in addition to hobbling the billing process.

Use cloud-based, legal-specific time tracking software

[Cloud-based, legal-specific time tracking software](#) is a productivity game-changer for firms of all sizes. As more attorneys are working remotely than ever before, the need to track time on the go has grown.

Cloud-based software makes it possible to track billable and non-billable hours from anywhere—and with legal-specific software, you'll get extra security features.

With TimeSolv, timekeeping compliance doesn't mean more work

TimeSolv is the most powerful and flexible web-based timekeeping application available. With time and billing solutions that are intuitive to use, achieving full compliance with your law firm's timekeeping policy is finally within reach.

To see the difference that TimeSolv can make for your firm, schedule your free one-on-one training and seven-day [free trial](#) today!