Tips for managing associates' billable hours

When your time is filled with managing cases, meeting and updating clients, and engaging in the perpetual business of attracting new business, managing your associates' billable hours is a task that can easily fall to the bottom of your to-do list. But making sure that associates are not only getting their work done but using their time efficiently and intelligently to meet clients' litigation and budgetary goals is one of the most important things you can do to keep clients happy. Below are a few tips to help you manage associates' billable hours to foster firm productivity and increase client satisfaction.

Eliminate Billable Hours Requirements

This is a controversial but increasingly popular option at firms of all sizes. Clients are smarter than ever about billable hours and the last thing they want are associates working inefficiently out of a misguided attempt to meet billable hours requirements. By eliminating such quotas, you entrust your associates with working smartly and efficiently by having them focus on the work that matters for client results.

Provide Modifiable Work Descriptions for Time Entries

Attorneys are often great thinkers, but they're not so great at keeping on top of administrative tasks like time entry. What should be a straightforward act of simply writing up work descriptions can get pushed to the end of the week, and at that point associates may end up writing less than comprehensive or fully descriptive entries, and a client may push back for lack of specificity (or an attorney may forget to input some hours altogether). By providing standard work descriptions for specific matters which the associates can modify as applicable, you make it easier for them to input their billable hours in a timely and accurate manner.

Evaluate Hours and Entries on Weekly Basis

In the same way that associates can wait too long to input their billable hours, partners can wait too long to actually check those hours and work descriptions. Usually, this is right about the time the bill needs to be submitted to the client. At that point, it may be too late to rectify problems with the bill such as questionable entries and descriptions as memories grow hazy. By evaluating hours and entries on a regularly basis, such as every week, problems can be caught early and associates will know that their accurate, timely entries are noticed and appreciated.

Mentor Associates to Foster Closer Working Relationships

When partners and supervisors are distant and rarely interacting with their associates, those associates may feel like their work doesn't matter or that no one is paying attention to what they do. This can result in all kinds of problems like missed deadlines, over- or under-billing on a project, or redundant and/or unnecessary tasks. By taking the time to mentor your associates, you instill in them a drive to align their goals with those of the firm: namely productivity and happy clients.

Incorporate Easy-to-Use Project Management Software

Technology provides partners and other supervisors with the ability to manage associates and their hours from afar without having to hover or interrupt the workflow, especially when associates are working extended hours and/or from remote locations. By utilizing TimeSolv's project management features, managing attorneys can easily assign tasks to associates, while monitoring hours billed and work completed anytime and from anyplace. With TimeSolv's project management features, will be able to see what tasks are taking up excess resources and where attention should be placed, all while keeping an eye on meeting client goals and your firm's bottom line.

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