

Tips to Maximize Your Law Firm's Billable Hours

The billable hour holds an interesting place within the legal profession. For most firms, it is the basis for measuring the value of their work and getting compensated for tasks completed. But it can also be an area of contention when the money coming into the firm doesn't seem to match the hours and effort being put into casework.

To deal with this frustration, it's important to implement strategies that maximize billable hours. Often times, lawyers don't even recognize that they have gaps in their time tracking and billing processes. They just know that they feel overworked and undercompensated.

Be sure to look at what's currently happening within your firm so you can identify potential improvements. Then, consider some of the following tips to maximize your law firm's billable hours.

Minimum time increments

Lawyers use minimum time increments to round up time spent on individual tasks for billing purposes. Though controversial, ABA Formal Opinion 93-379 Billing for Professional Fees, Disbursements and Other Expenses (1993) recognizes this practice stating:

"In matters where the client has agreed to have the fee determined with reference to the time expended by the lawyer, a lawyer may not bill more time than she actually spends on a matter, except to the extent that she rounds up to minimum time periods (such as one-quarter or one-tenth of an hour)."

Lawyers who use minimal time increments ensure that all time spent on a matter is billed and compensated for... even a three-minute telephone call.

Record tasks as you complete them

Stop waiting until the end of the day to record time spent on client tasks. Memory is unreliable, creating a strong possibility for inaccurate start and stop times. You may even forget that entire task you handled first thing in the morning.

Instead of waiting, record times as tasks are completed throughout the day. This is much easier to do with a convenient and mobile time tracking software like TimeSolv. You can access the time tracking clock from your desktop computer or from your smart phone. Even with no available internet connection, it allows you to track your time from the app and sync it with your office system once a connection becomes available.

With technology as available and convenient as TimeSolv, there's no reason for delay when recording billable hours.

Create a firm-wide time tracking policy

Accurate time tracking doesn't just fall on one member of the practice. It should apply to the entire law firm staff. Think about how much money is potentially lost firmwide when time isn't adequately tracked. By creating and sharing an office-wide policy, you communicate the importance of accurate time tracking among every member of the firm, while implementing processes that promote it. Simply drafting a written policy can dramatically affect the time tracking culture of your legal practice to maximize total billable hours.

Create a policy that requires time entry as tasks are completed. Then, implement a system for weekly review of time entered, so that gaps can be quickly identified and addressed. Also set a standard billing procedure, so invoices go out on a regular basis. Shortening the time between task completion and invoicing leads to faster compensation for billable hours.

Increase your productivity

Take a realistic look at how you spend your time. Are you really working on client matters, or are you spending time watching videos and catching up on social media? Particularly within a law firm environment, time spent on nonproductive tasks takes away from billable hours.

Make deliberate decisions about staying on task and spending your time profitably. Get rid of interruptions by turning off social media alerts and saving email messages for the end of the day. You can also use one of the many task management apps on the market to keep your mind on billable hours and off of unprofitable distractions.

Complete billing descriptions

When clients dispute legal bills, it's not only inconvenient, but time spent dealing with the dispute takes away from the maximization of billable hours. Complete billing descriptions cut down on client disputes.

Vague descriptions, like one hour "phone calls" and two hour "meetings," give clients plenty of reason to challenge your law firm bill.

Remove those reasons to complain by including complete descriptions in your invoices. Instead of a simple "phone call" description, state "telephone call with opposing counsel regarding upcoming settlement conference." With the addition of a few more words, you can save time and billable hours.

Delegate strategically

You have support staff for a reason. Delegate less profitable tasks to paralegals that bill at a lower hourly rate and nonbillable tasks to non-billing support staff members whenever possible. Save the most profitable responsibilities for the highest billing members of your firm. To truly maximize your billable hours, make sure you're not doing something that a paralegal could be doing. Stop making copies and updating client files. Delegate those tasks to support staff members.

Track all time... billable and non-billable

Don't just track billable hours because non-billable hours can tell you just as much about what's happening within your firm. Have all members track their hours, whether billable or not. When you have a clear view of where the firm's time is spent, you can better evaluate how resources are best used.

Maybe you notice that an associate spends way too much time on nonbillable tasks that could be handled by a secretary. A review of your

time tracking records would help you identify this issue and address it immediately.

Get to maximizing

Don't let your firm's valuable time and efforts go without compensation. Use these tips to maximize billable hours and promote higher profitability. To learn more about TimeSolv, click [here](#) for a free, no-obligation trial.