

Lop Legal Costs

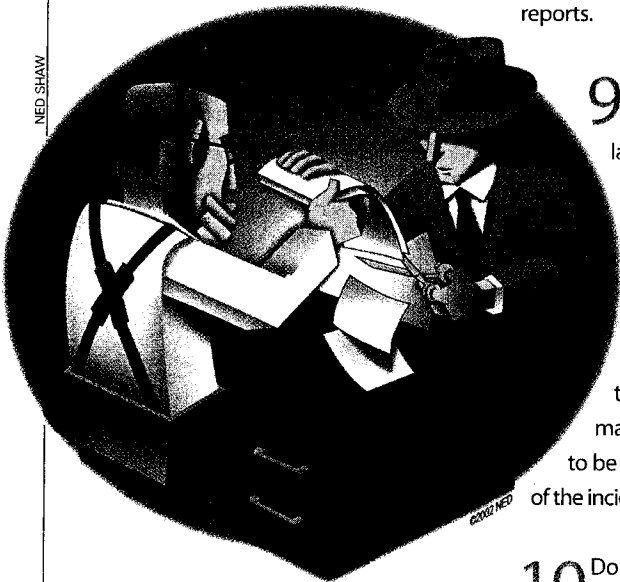
by Deborah L. Jacobs

10 ways to reduce your next legal bill:

1 Dispense with the pleasantries. When you're paying by the hour, the meter's running on every conversation. It's best to skip small talk and get right to substance.

2 Educate yourself. Get a basic understanding of basic legal principles so you won't pay the lawyer to do so.

3 Make your goals clear. At the end of each conversation with your lawyer, discuss the next step. To avoid misunderstandings, send a follow-up note outlining your concerns.



4 Keep the lawyer behind the scenes. Unless you're totally tongue-tied, you can negotiate basic agreements, send correspondence and even resolve conflicts directly with other business executives.

5 Avoid meetings. Your goal here is to reduce the time your lawyer spends meeting with you and with others on your behalf. Unless you're going over complex documents or would gain a strategic advantage

face-to-face, most business can take place by phone, fax, or letter.

6 Organize relevant documents. Write a memo (including an index) summarizing the contents of documents you turn over to your lawyer. This cuts down on the time he or she must spend wading through paper.

7 Brief your lawyer in writing. Before phoning or visiting with anything more than a quick question, send your lawyer a short memo summarizing the key facts and any legal questions.

8 Help your lawyer be efficient. Unless you're up against a deadline or a deal is moving quickly, don't call for daily progress reports.

9 Let the lawyer know you're pinching pennies. Just sensitizing the lawyer to your cost concerns may help deter unnecessary spending and keep those billable hours lean. Also alert the lawyer to what a business deal (or a potential legal battle) is worth to you. Keep photocopies and faxes to a minimum. If travel is essential, make clear that you expect all costs to be itemized, including a breakdown of the incidentals on hotel bills.

10 Don't pay a premium for expedited services. Unless it's really a rush, don't let your lawyer get carried away with couriers and overnight mail. When time is of the essence and confidentiality isn't an issue, log onto e-mail. Also, specify that you're not to be billed for overtime for secretaries and paralegals, as these charges are subject to abuse.

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Protect yourself

Records to store off-site

Nothing can ease the anguish from disasters like fires, floods and storms. But you can ease your business's recovery with some preparation.

Here is a list of the records you need to store outside your business or office:

- Year-end (Dec. 31, or fiscal) general ledger and profit and loss statements for the past five years

- A copy of computer backup disks, tapes or CD-ROMs

- A copy of client lists

- A copy of your most recent periodic inventory (both merchandise and raw materials)

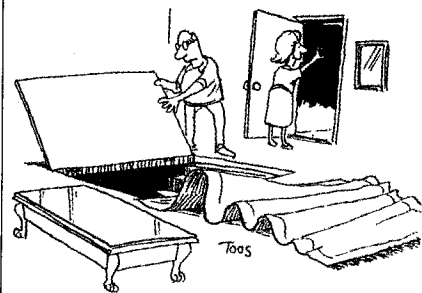
- A list of your normal inventory items and suppliers (with addresses and account numbers)

- Photos or videotapes of the interior of your office, with descriptions of furniture, fixtures and other assets, including serial numbers

- A copy of your depreciation schedule, with serial numbers

Source: California Society of Enrolled Agents

Humor@Work



With their guests gone, Frank and Alice returned to building their home-based business.

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