

Hiring a lawyer is step one when you need legal advice or help. Step two is the most crucial as you need to have a clear idea what the lawyer is going to cost. Most lawyers charge by the hour and rates may vary from USD 60-USD 300 per hour. It depends on the lawyer, the extent of your case, and where the case is to be fought.

In cases of personal injury or worker's compensation often lawyers agree to a contingent fee agreement. In this case they do not charge by the hour but take one-third of the compensation awarded. However you will still need to bear costs like court filing fees and costs of deposing witnesses and so on.

While most lawyers do not negotiate on fees you could think about:

1. Discussing your case and personal finances openly with the lawyer. Ask whether he will consider a consolidated fee instead of an hourly rate.
2. Explain how your case will benefit him and his firm. Sometimes even big firms and lawyers take on cases for less than their standard rates if it will benefit them in some way.
3. Think about using a lawyer attached to a smaller firm than a large one. New firms and smaller firms may quote a rate lower than an established lawyer.
4. Ask whether they offer better terms if you undertake to do a considerable amount of foot work for the case.
5. If you need legal representation for your business or family on a sustained basis many firms do offer a better rate based on the volume of work you will bring them.
6. Indicate that you will not waste too many hours of the lawyer by ensuring that you jot down facts of the case clearly, bring witnesses to meet the lawyer, and keep handy all documents necessary for the case.
7. Save money by not wasting the lawyer's time on phone calls. Remember he will bill you even if you are just having a friendly chat or are weeping on his shoulder. Prepare to be short and precise when you speak to him. As far as possible put things down on paper and send it to his office. E-mails work better than phone calls.
8. You know your case better than anyone else so make detailed notes and prepare a file for the lawyer with details such as names, addresses, what happened when and so on. This way you will not waste time meeting with the lawyer unless unavoidable.
9. Request for regular billing and keep track of the time, costs and so on. If you study the bills carefully and recognize

Always put things down in writing, especially the fee agreement. The agreement should include the rate, services covered, and what expenses are not covered by the agreed on fees and are to be paid at actual. In fact by law any legal fees over USD 1000 must be agreed upon in writing.

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