

HOW TO KEEP LEGAL COSTS AT A MINIMUM

Legal fees have the potential to create conflict between a lawyer and their client, if both lawyer and client are “not on the same page”.

If you want to keep your legal fees to a minimum, you first need to understand how your lawyer charges for their work.

Most lawyers charge on an hourly basis, at a particular rate. For example, the hourly rate may be \$400/hour (plus GST). Let’s use this hourly rate to show in practical terms how lawyers charge.

Each hour is divided into 10 units, which means that 1 unit comprises 6 minutes. Your lawyer will therefore be charging you \$40.00 for every 6 minutes (or part thereof) they spend working on your file ($\$40.00 \times 10 \text{ units} = \400.00).

This means that if you phone your lawyer and spend 4 minutes on the phone with him/her, you will be charged \$40.00 for the phone call. If you phone your lawyer and spend 15 minutes on the phone with him/her, you will be charged \$120.00 for the phone call (being 3 units x \$40.00 each unit).

Clients also need to remember that your lawyer will charge you for all their time, including but not limited to:

- (a) making a file note of all phone calls on the file;
- (b) drafting letters/documents;
- (c) perusing drafts of their letters/documents;
- (d) amending and finalising letters/documents;
- (e) receiving correspondence from the other party, including perusing such correspondence and forwarding it to you;
- (f) providing you with advice at all relevant times, whether oral or written;
- (g) taking your instructions;
- (h) sending letters/documents to other party;
- (i) sending letters/documents to you, the client.

To keep your legal costs at a minimum, the following “tips” may assist:

- (a) only phone/email your lawyer when you really need to;
- (b) contacting your lawyer by phone/email on many occasions (say 5 times in one day), will actually cost you more (as the lawyer will charge you separately for each phone call/email received), than just communicating with your lawyer once and discussing all issues during that one phone call/email;
- (c) make sure you provide your lawyer with all information you have been asked to provide, and ensure that such information is true (where you do not so, this has the potential to cause delay which increases your legal fees);
- (d) follow your lawyer’s advice – there is no doubt that where you choose not to do so, your matter will end up costing you more, as it will take longer to resolve;

- (e) be sensible – if you are not sensible where necessary, and do not make concessions where advised, your matter will again end up costing you more, as it will take longer to resolve;
- (f) only start court proceedings where you must, and on the advice of your lawyer – once court proceedings have been initiated, your costs will run into the thousands of dollars.

At Oner Family Law, we are transparent when it comes to advising clients of what their matter will cost them, and how we charge. We ensure that there are never any “nasty surprises” when it comes to issuing our accounts. Contact Oner Family Law for all your family law needs.