

Want to reduce divorce costs?

Lawsuits are notorious for costing not only money, but also time and patience. You may not always be able to keep your time or your frustration under control, but there are a few things you can do to save on legal fees.

College Station family law, probate and civil law attorney Randy Michel was recently interviewed by FoxBusiness.com on this topic. "Advice, advocacy and time are the only things a lawyer has to sell," says Michel. "The more advice, advocacy and time a lawyer puts into your case, the more expensive your case will be."

When you communicate, be organized. Be smart about how you work with your attorney. Understand which actions will be worth the cost to pursue.

Focus

Hold your calls and emails to a minimum. Attorneys bill their time to take calls, to read emails and to reply to emails. When you call or meet with your attorney, suggests Michel, know in advance what you want to accomplish

the most important items at the top. If you run short on time, at least you will have covered your most important issues. Similarly, organize your email content to be concise and on point. Avoid the temptation to vent and ramble.

Lawyers are not psychologists

Your history and current emotional state may be relevant to your case, but try not to repeat it over and over.

Michel explains, "So often in emails or phone calls or office visits, the client doesn't have so much of a legal question or problem or issue, as a psychological or emotional issue. When you turn me into your psychologist, you're getting someone who isn't a psychologist but you are paying attorney's prices. You wouldn't want a cardiologist to act as an electrician and charge the rates of a cardiologist, would you?"

Do it yourself

Michel suggests that you offer to do some of the work yourself.

"Ask your attorney or paralegal what tasks you might accomplish that would save you money or prevent you from being billed for

a certified copy of a needed document, take pictures of something needed for evidence, scan documents and obtain a signature."

Organize and label all documents before you give them to your attorney, says Michel. Ask the paralegal what this should look like. The idea here is to reduce the time spent by your attorney and therefore reduce your bill. Organize and label in the manner that works best for the attorney. This might not be the way you would do it, but it is the manner that will save you the most money. When you do this, your attorney and the paralegal will not need to.

Caution: Check with the paralegal or attorney before handing over a stack of documents, warns Michel. "Don't flood your attorney with unnecessary documents. Attorneys assume that if their clients hand them documents, those documents must be important, and the clients must want the

attorney to look at the documents. If that is not the intent, don't hand us the documents."

Take advantage of your attorney's expertise

Your attorney has far more experience with legal issues than you do. Check with him or her before committing to doing something that may not be a good use of your money.

At your first meeting, ask your attorney about alternatives to litigation. Alternative dispute resolution procedures such as mediation, summary jury trial and collaborative law are less expensive than litigation to resolve a dispute.

Think about whether a given task is going to "move the ball down the field" in your favor or whether it will just tweak the other side.

Michel explains, "if it doesn't aid your case, don't spend the money."

Listen to your attorney's

advice before pursuing tasks such as the following:

- Hiring a private investigator when nothing suspicious is going on.
 - Hiring a business valuation expert when both sides have agreed to a value and are confident of its validity.
 - Hiring a CPA when the real divorce issues deal with the children and the financial issues are really just "pots-and-pans."
 - Seeking the other side's phone records from the phone company when those records might be had through another avenue or not needed at all. Michel points out that getting phone records from the company is very expensive and hardly ever worth doing.
- On a parallel note, Michel says, "Just because you can legally do a given task, and may very well prevail, it does

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not mean that you should do that task."

He cautions us to ask your attorney about the merits of filing a protective order to prevent the other side from obtaining your recent medical records, when all they would reveal would be a couple of bouts of

the flu and some other innocuous condition over the past three years.

While legal disputes are disruptive and expensive, Michel says "You can help minimize the cost when you work with your attorney in a

reasonable, thoughtful and efficient way."

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