



# MANAGING CLIENT EXPECTATIONS

Two things make it almost impossible to achieve client satisfaction: taking an already-disgruntled client, and taking a client whose expected results are impossible.

The first issue can become evident with proper vetting, such as someone who has been to several lawyers with no success, or they are especially argumentative or vindictive. The second may be less obvious initially, but can be ascertained by thoroughly exploring the following two questions.

**What Do You Want?** The best lawyers are both knowledgeable about the law and are good listeners. Informing and educating potential clients is important, but must start with understanding their concerns and expected outcome. One way to accomplish this is to ask a potential client to write out their expectations. This provides an attorney the opportunity to provide feedback on reasonable outcomes and timelines. It also begins to shape the scope of representation and other parameters that are then included in an engagement letter.

**What Will It Cost?** Most people know lawyers typically work at an hourly rate. Although it is important to tell a potential client your hourly rate, many – or even most – nonlawyers have no idea how many hours their matter may require. Educating your potential client about the estimated hours required can help prepare them for the total cost. Additionally, regular or periodic billing will avoid the shock of one large bill at the conclusion of their matter. Your fee structure should also be included in your engagement letter.

ABA data indicates that approximately 14% of all malpractice claims are a result of poor client communications. Thoroughly exploring these questions can help avert confusion leading to a claim.

Clients may not understand the process or length of time it can take to get on the docket, hear back from a tax filing, or even receive a ruling on a motion. To them, their matter is the most important one in your office. Always provide regular updates and respond quickly to questions to affirm the importance of their matter.

