

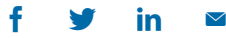
October 27, 2017 PRACTICE POINTS

# 5 Billing Tips for Young Lawyers

Making the most of your time

by Michael S. LeBoff

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**1. Be Descriptive.** Time sheets are your opportunity to show the client and billing partners what they are paying for, so your time sheets should explain the value you are adding. A generic description like “research procedural issues” is likely to draw pushback from the client, if they are paying attention. On the other hand, “analyze and develop strategies for contesting service of summons” provides the client with enough information that he or she does not need to ask the billing partner what happened.



**2. Avoid Block Billing.** If you handle three different tasks on a matter in a single day, you should record three separate billing entries. An entry such as: “Attend status conference, prepare motion to dismiss, and confer with client regarding document production: 8.0 hours” makes it impossible to know how much time you spent on each task. The exception to this rule is email and telephone communications, which should often be grouped together to avoid having multiple entries for “email client regarding document production,” “review client response to email regarding document production,” “prepare response to client email regarding document production,” etc. “Email correspondence with client regarding document production” is a much better approach.

**3. Proofread Time Entries.** Like any other written product, your timesheets reflect the level of carefulness or carelessness that goes into your work. While a client is unlikely to challenge a time entry because of a typo, it does create the impression of sloppy work product. So, proofread your time entries, or, have an assistant or billing clerk proofread the entries. But, do not mistake the billing partner for your proofreader.

**4. Track and Enter Your Time Daily.** The endless hours you spend working for your clients mean nothing if you do not bill the time. All attorneys should be tracking their time contemporaneously and recording time every day. It is too difficult to try to recreate your week or month at the end of the billing cycle. If you try, you are almost certain to make inaccurate estimates of time spent. If you estimate too high, you are charging your client for unearned fees. If you estimate too low, you have short-changed yourself and your firm. In addition, with all the distractions throughout the day (emails, phone calls, unscheduled conferences), you can lose a lot of time by neglecting to record the many smaller tasks you do throughout the day.

**5. Record All Your Time.** As a young attorney, there is often a natural inclination to self-discount your time, believing you should have done a task more quickly than the time it really took. For example, you may have spent 8 hours preparing for a deposition, but only recorded 4 because you felt that was more reasonable. When the billing attorney sees that entry, she thinks you only worked a half day, when you actually worked a full day. Moreover, as a younger lawyer, you may not yet have the experience to fully assess how long a task should take. Young attorneys should record all their time. The billing attorney can then decide what to pass on to the client.

*Michael S. LeBoff is senior counsel with Klein & Wilson in Newport Beach, California.*

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