

Here's how to reduce the costs of hiring lawyers

Between you and the thickening layers of federal, provincial, municipal, legislation stands the lawyer.

Protecting yourself from criminal charges or civil suits usually means forming an alliance with a lawyer. Such a relationship may have to endure for months, perhaps years.

Complaining to the lawyer about prices charged for legal services will threaten the stability of the lawyer-client relationship.

Lawyers are defensive about their fees. And, as a general rule, you need the lawyer more than the lawyer needs you.

Why let haggling antagonize your hired "ally"? Go into the alliance knowing that lawyers are sometimes necessary, and always expensive.

Here are a dozen tips that will help you reduce, or at least control the cost of hiring a lawyer.

1) Time is a major factor lawyers take into consideration when setting up their costs. You can control part of those costs by limiting the amount of contact you have with the lawyer, and making the most of those contacts.

Expect to be charged for each time you drop by the lawyer's office to see how the case is going and for each telephone call you make to her. Before you pick up the telephone, ask yourself if the call is really necessary. Is there a cheaper way of getting the same information?

If you can not live without the lawyer's advice, keep a record of the date, duration, and subject matter of the call. Precise records will be useful if you question the bill.

Most lawyers will agree to keep you up-to-date with developments in your case by way of a monthly reporting letter. In the long-run this may be cheaper, and you have a written report. If she needs information from you, she will telephone.

When you have an appointment, take with you all documents that may be important for that meeting. There's no sense giving her another item to add to the bill because you forgot to bring along the mortgage, rental agreement, marriage contract, or business record.

Before the meeting, write down any questions that occur to you and important facts concerning the issue. A point-form list of facts may help you and the lawyer understand the problem quicker.

At the end of the meeting determine if you should have another one, and then schedule it.

2) Find out if you qualify for free legal help by applying to the Legal Aid Plan.

3) The Halton Hills Community Legal Clinic may be able to help you with your family benefits, landlord, welfare, or workers' compensation. The legal clinic serves clients from

within Halton. It's located at 72 Mill Street, Georgetown. Its telephone number is 877-5256 and it's open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The legal clinic advertises free legal services for "the low income community of Halton Region."

What happens if you're financially poor and you're charged with a criminal offence? That should be covered by Legal Aid.

But if you don't qualify for such services and you can't afford to pay for a lawyer? Lawyers like to believe that no one who is too poor to pay a lawyer will have to go unrepresented in court.

Shop around and see if you can find a lawyer who will take on your case for free, or at a cheaper than usual rate.

In the words of The Canadian Bar Association's Code of Professional Conduct: "It is in keeping with the best traditions of the legal profession to reduce or waive a fee in a situation where there is hardship or poverty, or the client or prospective client would otherwise effectively be deprived of legal advice or representation."

4) Check to find out if your employer, labor union or guild has a staff lawyer. He may be interested in your case.

Even if he can not assist you directly, you may learn his opinion of your case or he may steer you to a lawyer knowledgeable about the type of law you are involved with.

5) If you have been charged under the Highway Traffic Act, you may want to consider hiring a para-legal service, rather than a lawyer. Para-legal services are private businesses; they are not lawyers, but often they are cheaper than lawyers.

6) If you use the Lawyer Referral Service offered by the Law Society of Upper Canada, your first half-hour

of consultation with the lawyer will be free of charge if you mention that you used the service to find that lawyer.

Use this opportunity to determine whether the problem you are facing really requires a lawyer to find a solution. She may suggest other solutions.

To telephone the Lawyer Referral Service from Oakville, dial 947-3330. Dial 1-800-268-8326 from other parts of Halton.

Briefly describe the problem you are facing and where you live, then the operator will give you the name of a local lawyer who has indicated an interest in your type of problem. The service is available during business hours.

7) When you have selected a lawyer who you feel you can trust, ask about how much the service will cost you and what arrangements can be made for payments.

Do not be shy. A clear understanding of the costs at the beginning of the alliance decreases the probability of unhappy discoveries about money mid-way through the case.

A useful method of reducing the chance of a later dispute, is for you to have the lawyer estimate the charges in writing for your records.

The written estimate ought to be possible in straight forward cases. If the case is expected to be complicated, the lawyer should be able to estimate some of the charges and point out any uncertainties so that you can make an informed decision.

If something unusual or unforeseen occurs that will effect the bill, the lawyer should explain it to you. Many lawyers will agree to bill you, perhaps monthly. This method allows you to keep track of how much you owe and for what services. Or you may prefer to have a single bill at the end.

Remember there's no discount or refund if you're unhappy with the results of the lawyer's efforts.

8) Find out if other lawyers, senior or junior, will be called into to assist the lawyer you've been talking to, and what their fees are. These should show up on the bill.

9) You can save money by gathering up essential records, yourself.

10) If you learn of an important change in your legal circumstances, let your lawyer know immediately, because you do not wish to be paying for his time when it may no longer be necessary.

11) Check from time to time to determine from your records whether the bill is remaining within the estimate.

12) Something to consider if you have no plans to be associated with a lawyer for the long-term is to have her bill assessed.

An assessment is in effect a challenge to the lawyer for her to justify

her bill to you. Often it's successful. A court official, not a judge, conducts a hearing concerning the bill with you and the lawyer, then makes the decision.

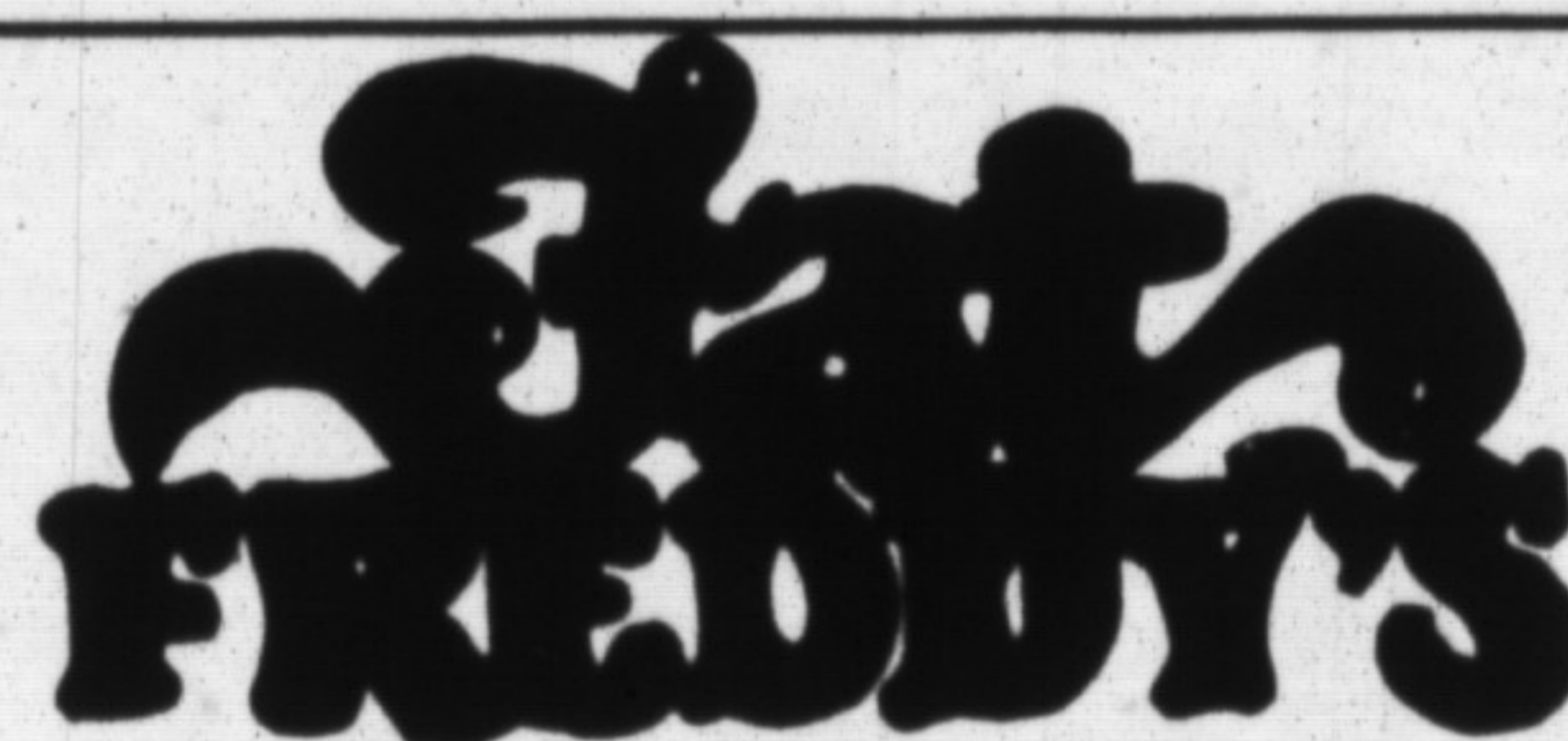
Take to the hearing, which usually lasts about an hour, any records of meetings and telephone calls.

In Halton you apply for an assessment hearing to the Local Registrar of the Supreme Court of Ontario at the Steeles Avenue courthouse in Milton.

The application for an assessment must be started in the jurisdiction where the lawyer lives, rather than where she has her office.

The application has to be made within 30 days of receipt of the bill. There's a \$25 application fee. If you are successful, you may ask the court official to add in the costs of the assessment.

Lawyers use the assessment procedure as a tactic to collect unpaid bills.



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**FRENCH IMMERSION
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Information meetings are being held to explain Grade 1 and Grade 7 French Immersion programs, starting in September 1990.

ACTON -	Monday, January 22, 1990, 7:00 p.m. Robert Little Public School 41 School Lane
GEORGETOWN -	Thursday, January 11, 1990, 7:30 p.m. George Kennedy Public School 75 Weber Drive
MILTON -	Thursday, January 18, 1990, 7:15 p.m. E.W. Foster Public School 320 Coxe Boulevard

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