

Who's who in a lawyer's office

Some lawyers work on their own while others work with assistants and other lawyers. Legal assistants are specially trained staff who work under the lawyer's supervision to prepare legal documents or do research. Articling students are law school graduates who are training to be lawyers. They often do research and conduct interviews. Articling students are also allowed to represent you on certain types of court matters. Your lawyer may also assign some of the more routine parts of your file to lawyers with lower billing rates to reduce costs.

Ways to reduce your legal costs

- Prepare for each meeting with your lawyer. Make sure you have all documents in order and that you have reviewed any documents your lawyer has sent you.
- Keep your communications with your lawyer concise and organized. Don't spend time discussing issues unrelated to your legal matter.
- Try to make the right decisions the first time – frequently changing your mind can cost you money.
- Ask for a billing estimate from your lawyer. A paralegal, articling student or a junior lawyer may be able to prepare a document or do research for you at lower hourly rates than a senior lawyer.
- Ask your lawyer if your expectations are reasonable and find out about your options.
- Be realistic and don't let your emotions dictate your actions. It's not wise to spend \$1,000 to recover a \$500 asset.

Legal Resources

Law Society of BC: Visit the Law Society website for more information about the society's services, finding and working with a lawyer, or becoming a lawyer (lawsociety.bc.ca).

BC Laws: Visit BC Laws for free public access to current BC statutes and regulations (bclaws.ca).

CanLII: A non-profit organization whose goal is to make Canadian law accessible for free (canlii.org).

Dial-a-Law: Provides pre-recorded information on specific legal issues. Call 604-687-4680 (toll-free 1-800-565-5297) or visit their website for a library of transcripts (dialalaw.org).

Family Law in BC: The Family Law in BC website is maintained by the Legal Services Society, BC's legal aid services provider (familylaw.lss.bc.ca).

Electronic Law Library: Maintained by Courthouse Libraries BC, this website provides BC residents with access to general legal information (bclibrary.ca/ell).

Law Libraries: The University of Victoria law school (library.law.uvic.ca), UBC law school (library.ubc.ca/law) and Courthouse Libraries BC (courthouselibrary.ca) are open to the public.

Law Line: A free telephone service of the Legal Services Society designed to help people who don't qualify for a legal aid lawyer to represent them (604-408-2172 or 1-866-577-2525).

Law Students Legal Advice Program: UBC law students offer free legal advice (under the supervision of a lawyer), except legal advice on family law and immigration matters. Call 604-822-5791 or go to their website at Islap.bc.ca.

Legal Services Society: Provides legal aid in BC. Call 604-601-6000 or visit them online at lss.bc.ca.

Pro Bono Law of BC: Call 604-893-8932 or visit probononet.bc.ca for information about free legal advice clinics throughout BC.

You and Your Lawyer

Lawyers in British Columbia must be members of the Law Society of BC, an independent organization founded in 1869 and funded by dues paid by all members of the profession. The society's primary mandate under the *Legal Profession Act* is to protect the public interest in the administration of justice. In fulfilling its regulatory duties, the society is responsible for the licensing, professional conduct and discipline of the more than 11,000 lawyers in BC.

The Law Society of British Columbia



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July 2009

The Law Society of British Columbia



The law is part of your daily life and lawyers are trained to guide you through the legal process. A lawyer can help you buy a home, write a will or run a business. A lawyer can also help you when you have an accident, when you and your spouse separate or when you have to go to court.

When do you need a lawyer?

As trusted legal advisors, skilled negotiators, effective advocates and creative problem-solvers, lawyers guide you through the legal process. A lawyer can help if you:

- buy a home
- write a will
- run a business
- have an accident
- separate from your spouse
- go to court

Finding the right lawyer

As a starting point, ask for a referral from:

- friends, relatives or co-workers
- your doctor, dentist or accountant
- social service agencies, counselling services or advocacy organizations
- Lawyer Referral Service at cba.org/bc or 604-687-3221 or toll-free 1-800-663-1919

Be aware that some people misrepresent themselves as lawyers and illegally offer legal services. Although the reduced cost of using an unqualified person to provide legal services may be tempting, it's not worth the risk. As part of its mandate to protect the public interest, the Law Society investigates allegations of unauthorized legal practice.

If you can't afford a lawyer

Many lawyers volunteer their time and expertise to provide access to the justice system for people who cannot afford to pay for legal services. If you can't afford to hire a lawyer, you may qualify for the legal aid program run by the Legal Services Society (lss.bc.ca). If you do not meet the criteria for legal aid, you may qualify for free legal advice from a Pro Bono Law of BC program (probononet.bc.ca).

Your first meeting with your lawyer

Before your first meeting, write out the details of your legal matter, setting out the facts in chronological order, and prepare a list of names, addresses and phone numbers of the people involved. Take all relevant documents with you.

Tell your whole story, even if it is damaging or embarrassing – your lawyer needs to consider all options. Anything you tell your lawyer for the purpose of obtaining legal advice is confidential and your lawyer is not allowed to disclose what you say without your consent.

Lawyers need to know that their clients are who they say they are. Law societies across Canada have rules about this. Bring identification with you. Your lawyer may ask to see your driver's licence or some other form of government-issued identification and the lawyer may need to take a copy of the document.

You also need to find out if your expectations are reasonable. Talk to your lawyer about his or her legal opinion. Make sure you and your lawyer agree on your plans and priorities and on the outcome you are looking for.

How lawyers set their fees

You and your lawyer should talk about fees the first time you meet. A lawyer's fee will vary depending on the type of legal assistance you require, the complexity of the file, the lawyer's skill and experience and the results achieved.

There is no fee schedule for legal services, and the Law Society has no authority to control what lawyers charge.

If you don't understand the charges on your bill or if you disagree with the amount, talk it over with your lawyer or another member of the law firm. If the billing discrepancy is not resolved, a free and informal fee mediation service is offered by the Law Society.

For more information on lawyers' fees, see the Law Society of BC's brochure *Understanding Your Lawyer's Fees* or go to the Law Society's website at lawsociety.bc.ca.