

Lifestyle / parenting & relationships

Divorce Court Blues

You may not have planned for divorce, but these 11 strategies can help control your legal fees.

By John Mayoue

Divorce is expensive, and given that lawyers charge by the hour, a prepared client will have more control over certain fees. PINK's legal expert explains what to do before the meter starts.

1. **Get organized.** Learn all that you can about your finances. Organize your thoughts on the facts of the marriage and gather all deeds, financial records and other important documents to take with you to the initial consultation.
2. **Learn about your state's divorce law.** Research how courts award spousal support, divide property, determine child support and establish child custody. Simply Google your state name and the words "divorce law." Bring a thorough list of questions to the initial consultation.
3. **Stay calm - or control your emotions as much as possible.** Never tell a lawyer you want to "just win at any cost" since the cost might quickly become higher than you expected. Let your attorney know from the start that money is an issue. No matter what your personal wealth, your divorce fees should not be limitless.
4. **Be involved and ask questions.** Listen to your counsel carefully and work with her to formulate an appropriate and efficient strategy to move the case toward settlement or, if unsuccessful, trial. But don't be afraid to ask questions about how she spends your money. If she fails to explain a certain action, don't hesitate to ask. "Why are you deposing my ex?" may seem like a stupid question, but asking it may help avoid an expensive mistake.
5. **Never incur an expense to get information you already have.** For example, your attorney may send requests for information - called discoveries - to your spouse to learn the location of a specific asset. But what if you already had that information but never told the attorney? These costly oversights can add up.
6. **Be aware that the meter is running each time your attorney or her assistant meets with you, speaks to you on the phone, files paperwork or does research on your behalf.** Though it may be tempting to vent to your attorney (after all, she's seen it all), never use your attorney or the staff as a counseling service. Her time will probably be much more expensive than that of a qualified therapist.
7. **Collect financial information, track down documents and do any other legwork that will be convenient and easy for you.** It will reduce your paralegal fees.
8. **Don't be afraid to tell your lawyer whenever you're doing something to cut down on legal fees.**
9. **Distinguish real emergencies from panic.** After-hours and weekend calls are expensive.
10. **Don't pay to fight battles you don't care to win.** Don't encourage (or allow) your attorney to secure an asset worth less than the cost of acquiring it. Let your attorney know which assets are important to you and which are not.
11. **If you feel you can settle certain emotional issues on your own - such as child custody or who should run the family business - do so with your attorney's advice.**



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