

## *How To Manage Your Lawyer*

When dealing with a busy or intimidating lawyer, it's easy to forget he or she works for you. Remember that you are the employer. Your lawyer is accountable to you and should answer your questions and provide regular progress reports on your case.

If you are having a problem with your lawyer, write a letter immediately explaining your concern. This could clear up any misunderstanding. If you have a written agreement (and HALT strongly urges you to get one if you don't), mention the provisions you think have been violated.

Why a letter? Because it's easy to forget what was said in a telephone conversation or in person and hard, if not impossible, to dispute what was written in a letter. Writing a letter will give you a chance to state your case clearly and dispassionately and give you written proof that you've communicated your concerns.

Keep your letter short and to the point. It should include:

- A concise summary of the problem.
- Questions you want answered.
- Possible solutions for working it out.
- The date by which you are asking the lawyer to answer in writing. (Allow about two weeks for a response.)

Don't accuse the lawyer in your letter, but be straightforward. Saying, "I expected a bill which itemized all the charges," or asking, "Is there a reason why such and such has not yet been completed?" is far less combative and more likely to get results than more confrontational statements, such as: "You were supposed to send me an itemized bill," or "You are late in completing. . .". Be cooperative but firm.

Date your letter and keep a copy in your files. If your questions are repeatedly ignored, a written record of your attempts to communicate can be important evidence if a dispute arises and you go to court or file a grievance with your state disciplinary agency. Insist on the information you need, but don't ask frivolous questions.

If you are not happy with your lawyer's answer, you may want to ask a second lawyer's advice. A second opinion will cost money, but you do need to make an informed decision. You may learn that your lawyer is on the right track. Alternatively, you may find that it's time to fire your lawyer and hire another.