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HOW TO; Bill 25 Hours in One Day

By CAMERON STRACHER APRIL 8, 2001

The lawyer's billable hour, like the quark or the gluon, is a convenient fiction. Its measurement varies from observer to observer and depends upon position. Take, for example, the one-minute phone call. Because many law firms bill in minimum quarter-hour increments, those 60 seconds are magically transmogrified into 15 billable minutes. Or take two hours of research spent on Client A's legal problem, which turns out to be the same as Client B's problem. Through a process of legal alchemy known as double billing, lawyers can make two into four. While double billing is condemned by the American Bar Association, lawyers are not bound by A.B.A. rulings, and are free to bill both clients for the same work. Associates are told that any time spent thinking about a client's legal woes, even while eating or jogging, should be billed. Herewith, if not an actual time sheet, a plausible one:

0.25 hr. Take shower. Think about litigation strategy while shampooing. 0.25 hr. Call for Dial-a-Car. 1.0 hr. Travel to airport in Lincoln Town Car. Read Wall Street Journal. 0.25 hr. Call client from cell phone at check-in. Reconfirm schedule. 5.0 hrs. Fly to California. Nap for 2.0 hours. 3.0 hrs. While awake on flight, read cases for another client. 0.25 hr. Use air phone to place one-minute call to confirm limo pickup. 1.0 hr. Travel from LAX to client headquarters. 0.25 hr. Cell phone call from limo to office to have secretary fax deposition notice. 2.0 hrs. Lunch with client at Spago. Discuss golf game. 4.0 hrs. Meetings with management team to prepare for depositions. 0.75 hr. Guffaw and banter with team after preparation. 0.5 hr. Travel to hotel for check-in and to freshen up. 1.0 hr. Ride Exercycle. Reflect on management team personalities. 0.75 hr. Check e-mail. 0.75 hr. While checking e-mail, conference call to discuss cases with other client. 2.5 hrs. Dinner with

management team at Asia de Cuba. More guffawing. 0.5 hr. Return to hotel in C.E.O.'s car. Discuss and digest meal. 0.25 hr. Leave voice mail for limo pickup in morning. 0.25 hr. Leave voice mail for C.E.O. to inform him of pickup time. 0.25 hr. Arrange for wake-up call. 0.25 hr. Idea for argument just as falling asleep. Total: 25.0 hours.

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