

Clients and Cell Phones

Hey all,

Am I the only fool that gives pretty much all of their clients their cell phone number? I started doing this from the beginning when I only had a few clients and it wasn't a problem at all but it's something I have continued doing and it's like I don't know how to stop! I work from my cell a lot because I'm constantly on the go so I guess the fact that I call from my cell opens the door to this. I feel like I'm overly stressed because they text me all of the time and a lot of the questions are things that could wait til I'm in the office or could have just been emailed to me.

Has anyone else had this issue and if so, how did you stop yourself?

Unless it was an emergency I did not respond to texts.

If they sent a text I would return with a phone call or email, and would tell them I don't respond to texts and they should call or email.

If they continued to text I would not respond at all until they called or emailed.

I usually wouldn't answer my phone after hours unless I knew the number. And I never answer between midnight and 8:30 unless I know the number and even then that would only get me to listen to the voice mail promptly.

I had one client who complained that it took me over 5 hours to get back to her and that I should have responded in 2. She called me at 5 am. I informed her my office hours were 9-5 and that I don't even bother with voicemails let alone returning calls until about that time. I have better things to do from 5-8 am, like sleep and then get kids to school

Erin Schmidt

I work from my cell phone as well but I set up a Google voice number which is what I give out to everyone. With Google voice you have a lot of different settings including "Do not disturb" which could certainly help with the unwanted calls!

Best,

Joshua M. Biletsky, California

SoloSez Popular Threads, May 2014

I also moved to a gv number and I can just ignore those calls if I want to. I have it set up that I have to accept them

Erin Schmidt

I often will call from my cell also, so they get my cell number. But I ask that clients use my office number generally, and explain that it is the best way to contact me. I don't always answer my cell and often don't listen to cell messages, but am rigorous about responding to calls on my office phone. And I am pretty strict about no texting. If they want to text that they're running a few minutes late, then fine. But substantive messages are discouraged. I generally don't have client emergencies, and no criminal practice.

Roger Traversa, Pennsylvania

In this mobile society I think it's imperative that we meet our clients where they are, so to say... I charge for texts and emails same as phone calls at a 10 minute minimum. I don't charge for ALL but I document on bill that I'm waiving the charge about every 4th one or so. My "rules of engagement" that I make all clients read and sign, points out that I will always try to respond within 24 hours unless on weekends and then I do anyway. What we handle for folks is usually in the top three things going on in their lives at the moment and I know if I was a client I would appreciate the availability. It's here folks, we can't ignore it. Embrace it but create rules you can live with. That's how i do it... FWIW...

Micah G. Guilfoil, Kentucky

No Google Voice numbers available in NYC. :(

Sincerely,

Dwayne Allen Thomas, New York

When I was a talent manager for a New York office for a bit while still in California I ended up using the app "Pinger" to get a New York number. Not nearly as good as Google Voice but it still had the basic features like calling and texting. Not sure if outgoing calls are still free though.

Best,

Joshua M. Biletsky

SoloSez Popular Threads, May 2014

Check every few hours. When I started looking for a google voice number there were none available, and several hours later there were about 20 so I picked one. Supposedly this happens often. Happy hunting.

Best,

Roger Quiles

I did not consider checking back before I made up the business cards.

lol

Sincerely,

Dwayne Allen Thomas

"I ended up using the app "Pinger""

I was using Pinger recently for a side business. I had the number less than a week when the solicitations started rolling in. Because of its use, I was expecting calls from unfamiliar numbers. I would answer, determine within 5 seconds that it was not a call I wanted, and hang up. And, Pinger would ding me for a minute.

Pinger is free if you call someone who is also on the Pinger network.

Kindly,
Jimmy Mac

(This message may have been dictated while driving and may contain misspellings, non-sequiturs, and/or inappropriate language.)

James M. McMullan, Alabama

Thanks, all! Erin I am going to try to incorporate some of your boundaries with the ultimate goal of not giving out my cell number at all in the future. Andrew, I definitely respond to texts right away so I think not doing so is going to help a lot. I don't want to be at their beck and call anymore! Thanks, guys. It always helps to know how others are handling these issues.

Fareeda Brewington

SoloSez Popular Threads, May 2014

I forward my office phone to my cell so that I'm available even when mobile and I also make calls from my cell when mobile so most people have my cell number. If I'm working after hours then I'll pick up but otherwise I let it go to voice mail and return the call during regular hours.

Nobody has had any issue with that but if they did I'd let them know I'm not available, and will not answer, 24/7.

Jessica M. Gorman, New York

Respond to clients in an organized fashion, during times that are responsive but not necessarily instantaneous. You have to retain control of your work schedule to accomplish tasks and scheduling response times works.

Don't fall into the trap of answering every text or email immediately. Review what is happening and needs to be accomplished before answering a call. Let people leave a message and call back if you are trying to get something done.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

I give out my cell to clients who may need to contact me when I am out of the office. Usually that means clients dealing with matters that are high-priority, high-stakes, or simply expensive enough that I feel like I should be available to them. But I don't feel obligated to answer it immediately or return the call immediately. I, like Darrell said, work through it in an organized manner.

I have had to tell clients that my office line is the priority line and that the cell is when you need to reach me and I am out. I have never had a problem with the clients I have said that too. They are mostly apologetic. Also, if you show through behavior that there is no guarantee you will answer or call back immediately, they often learn to cool their jets and understand.

Brian J. Hughes, Massachusetts

NEVER give out my personal cell number to clients. We need boundaries and time away from work!

But I love being able to use my cell for work, and call clients from court, etc., which is the joy of google voice. And it has the "do not disturb" function, so when I want to be off duty I can be.

Betsy Ehlen, Illinois

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I don't intentionally give it out, but if I call someone from my cell I am very clear that my cell is for my convenience, not theirs.

Jim Moriarty, Iowa

I NEVER give my cell phone out either. If I am not in my office, I am probably in court tending to another client. When I am court that client deserves my complete and undivided attention. It is not fair to have a client barge into that because they have a need for immediate gratification.

If I am not out of the office on client business, then that is time for me or my kids. I am not going to let a client intrude into that.

If I have to call a client from court, then I use Spoof Card so that my office number shows up on their caller ID. I can always see my emails, so if it is really urgent I can deal with it.

I rarely have a client ask for my cell phone. When they do, I tell them that I don't give out my cell phone number. My clients don't pay for round the clock access.

That being said, I do have a duplicate of my office phone at my house. On New Years Eve I will take every drunk driver I can get.

Do your clients have their doctor's cell phone? I bet not.

Michelle Kainen, Vermont

For good business clients and depending on the situation, if they ask me for my cell number, I say with my best lawyer smile:

"I am happy to give you my cell phone so you can call me after hours and on weekends. In fact, I encourage calls at those times, but I need to warn you that my hourly rate then is TRIPLE!"

After they recover from shock, I tell them I am just kidding! The funny thing is, even though I occasionally get a worthy cell call, most clients don't abuse the privilege. I think that is because even though I said I was kidding, now every time they think about calling my cell the joke about tripling the cost is in their mind!

Phillip Glasscock, Arizona

"Do your clients have their doctor's cell phone?"

Actually, one of my doctors gives out a post-procedure info sheet with his cell phone number to call in case if there is a complication.

But, I agree -- never give out your cell phone number. I learned it early in my practice when someone from my prior firm by accident gave my cell phone number to a PC in a PI case. I never was retained (turned out there was no case) but the PC kept calling me at odd times with different questions (e.g., a call at 10 a.m. on Sunday asking if I could do her divorce where there was no issues, no assets, or urgency -- she just wanted to talk, it did not matter about what.)

So, from that day, I only gave out my cell phone number in rare circumstances -- e.g., if I was meeting a client at a courthouse, etc. -- and that has not been abused so far.

And, last fall I got an official, separate firm cell phone which I am sharing more freely.

Ekaterina Schoenefeld, New Jersey

I use only a cell number. I am on the go all the time too and would miss many calls otherwise. Clients know I use only the cell and that I will get back to them as soon as I can. If I do not call back right away, it is because I am giving another client the same uninterrupted time I have given them I have not had a problem with late night calls but as a solo, being available is important and if that means I call back on a week-end, then I do. I make it clear that I am available within reason, meaning regular work hours but those are 6-6 for me and sometimes later. Because I have children and their needs pop up during my work day, often I find I am working at, say, 6:16 p.m. on a Thursday night because I am getting caught up.

I do not think it is a bad thing and I think my clients appreciate that I make myself available to them. On the other hand, I do estate planning and not litigation. Litigation or other longer term matters might be a different thing.

Eliz. C.A. Johnson, California

SoloSez Popular Threads, May 2014

I did work for an attorney who told PCs during consultations things like "I was in court all morning. Tough case, but we're working hard to win." Then, at some point he would tell them he is sorry that he won't always be available, but when it's their turn for him to appear in court or get out a solid brief, they are going to be happy that their case has his full attention. It worked well.

I don't say it exactly like that, but even though I am a paralegal I am a solo like many of you. I have let clients know that since I work for multiple attorneys there may be times I am focusing on an assignment and they may get my voicemail. Emails are best for me. It does not mean I don't pick up. It just means every client has the benefit of my focused work, which is litigation work that we all know means deadlines, deadlines, deadlines and the need for uninterrupted time. They all appreciate that. All have been very courteous, since they too have to be concerned about the same thing. Most email to schedule calls in advance.

I don't see why all of you can't take the same approach. I personally would be uncomfortable with an attorney who is always available. If he's working hard for someone else, it means he works hard for me would be my mindset.

I have texted sometimes. Attorneys out on the road a lot sometimes need that and it gets something quick out of the way.
Donna Ireland (paralegal)

I only use a cell, much like Eliz. above does- my hours are odd. Also, with criminal work, sometimes clients need to call me on the weekends or at nights, when they are being arrested. Just a couple weeks ago a client called me when the police were at his house- I gave him advice about not talking to them, that it was based on the advice of his lawyer that he just talked to, etc.

The State just dropped the case yesterday :)
But I often let it go to voicemail, check it and call back.

I do text, but I'm learning to do it less often; I think it depends a lot on the client. I have one client who is partially deaf, and texting is easier for him than the phone. Others sometimes abuse the privilege. I don't initiate texting, but I will sometimes respond, with brief messages, such as "k, yes, no", or confirming appointment times, courtrooms, etc.

Tom Almquist, Florida

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Also, the concern with texting clients with anything other than appointment updates and lesser important things to keep is maintaining that information in the client file, right? So I don't want to be texting any legal advice or anything I am going to want a record of having said so I leave that to e-mail.

Eliz. C.A. Johnson

When I'm texting with clients, I copy the texts and email them to myself so that I can save them to the client file.

Miriam N. Jacobson, Pennsylvania

I'm not of fan of having the clients call me on my cell but sometimes I feel I have to. Like for the client who might be arrested. Or for a particularly contentious family law matter. After all I'm not cheap so being available is a good selling point. I've only had a few clients abuse it. Seriously at 3 AM I really don't think there much I can do for a custody "crisis"

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

I'm not a fan of giving out my personal cell number out, so I got a prepaid basic cell phone separate from my smart phone account that I can later convert and add onto my personal cell phone account.

That is the one I will give out to clients. It also happens to be my "office" line number. I can choose whether to answer it or not if it rings outside business hours. (at this point since I'm so new, I answer it unless it rings between 10pm and 8am)

I got the prepaid plan for right now because I'm using the phone so little. I have \$1.99 a day for the first call of the day. Every call afterwards that day is unlimited calling. Best part is, if I don't use the phone there's no charge for that day.

The money I pay is good for certain length of time. \$15 is good for max 30 days before you need to reload. (Of course if you use that \$\$ up before the 30 days are up you'll need to add more sooner than 30 days) \$30 has a max life of 3 months. More \$\$ lasts longer. If you don't use all the money, and you reload before you loose service, you get the left over money added on top of your reloaded amount. (You never loose the money you paid in unless you don't reload & the phone gets turned off) Great for those weeks when I have an unusual spike in the number of calls I get/make.

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What I try to do is make inquiry calls for my business all in the same day. Takes a bit of planning but it's worth the cost savings.

Once I'm regularly making/receiving calls on that line, I'll make it a regular monthly phone added to my account.

Hope that helps. If anyone has questions about this prepaid cell, email me & we'll talk. (I sold cell service for a while during bar exam prep)

AnnMichelle Hart, Washington

I learned my lesson about giving my personal cell phone number out early on too.

I got a separate prepaid line to use for my office. I used to have 2 separate phones, but now I have dual sim phone, so I get calls from both numbers on one phone. I can select which number I want to text from or call from.

Since its two different lines, I know when it's business or when it's personal and respond accordingly. It has worked well for me.

Tonya Gibbs

The trick is to stop acknowledging their cell phone contact attempts until they call your office line. (Unless it's urgent, of course.)

Michael Kaczynski

One thing you might want to do is port your cell phone number to your land line and then get a new cell phone number. That way you can keep giving out the same phone number to your clients. I think it's easier to give a new cell phone number to your friends and family.

Rick Bryan, New York

Check out numbergarage.com for porting - I don't know how that works with cell numbers, though.

Miriam N. Jacobson, Pennsylvania

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I don't think I could port the number to a landline because it's a Boston number and I live in Philly. I've had this number for over 10 years so I don't want to just give it up.

Fareeda Brewington

It pays to ask them.

Miriam N. Jacobson
