

We Do Not Accept Walk-ins

I was looking at a website for opposing counsel today. I saw this

Please note that due to the pressing nature of court schedules we cannot accept walk-in prospective clients. If you feel that The XXX Firm may be able to assist you with a legal issue, please contact us by telephone to schedule an appointment.

What do you think of that?

Did they post the United video right beside it? :):)

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

I see no problem with it, although I don't know why they'd bother posting it on the website. Most walk-ins probably don't review office policies on a website. :)

My office is in a retail shopping center, so people sometimes walk in when they notice the lawyer next to their vet or across from their kid's taekwondo, etc. My staff greets them and handles them just like if they had called us - gets their name, what kind of case they have, and determines if it's a desirable lead for us or not. If not, they're referred out. If we want to talk to them, they're scheduled for a time for me to call them.

When I'm actually in the office, I'm usually tied to my phone with back-to-back meetings or rushing to meet a deadline, so no time to meet with random people who walk in or even to take unscheduled phone calls.

Andrew Flusche, Virginia

I think it is practice and location specific. Some practice areas have virtually no walk-in business. Some attorneys find walk-ins to be low probability clients. Others find walk-ins to be a gold mine. Then there is the security issue...

William M. Driscoll, Massachusetts

I have the same policy, but it applies to current clients as well. I don't have staff, so if I'm in a meeting or on the phone with a client when there's a walk-in I have to, at minimum, interrupt the current client who is paying for my uninterrupted time to see what the walk in wants and whether it's something pressing enough that it's worth his or her time to stick around and wait to talk to me. Few things that have (I think) made it work, though. First, my practice is transactional, focusing on business and nonprofit matters so there's typically less urgency than in other practice areas, as Bill mentioned. I also try to make it easy to get in touch by responding to calls and emails by the next business day and, particularly if the matter is something closer to an emergency, sooner when possible.

Anyway, I've never had any complaints even on the rare occasions I have gotten walk ins and explained that an appointment is necessary. Of those times, most did make an appointment, but a couple others said they would contact me and never did, so I guess it's possible I might have missed out on some business.

Noel French, Michigan

That's my policy and one I've seen as well for firms with more than one office. Between Court and managing multiple offices, I'm not always in the office that the particular client wants to meet me at. Plus, walk-ins can really disrupt my work if I'm in the middle of something.

Andrew M. Ayers, New York

We would offer to allow the person to wait to be seen, warning them that it may be several hours until they can be worked in.. or setting up an appointment for them.

Usually I had 1 or 2 no shows or people running late that would allow me to get a walk in seen without much of a wait (though it had been up to 2 hours before)

Erin M. Schmidt, Ohio

I just say "consultations and client meetings are by appointment only."

Suzanne Hawkins

I have had only a virtual law practice since 2005.

For someone to “walk-in” on me they would have to first crawl inside the Interweb tubes.

Rex C. Anderson, Arizona

Why post absolutes? If the surviving spouse and children of a guy run over and killed by a drunk UPS driver walks in my door without an appointment, I just cleared my calendar for her.

Robert "Robby" W. Hughes, Jr., Georgia

When I was at my first firm (BIG DOWNTOWN DALLAS FIRM), one of the firm's clients walked in one day and asked if the firm had a tax lawyer – turned out it was the guy who started the Hard Rock Café and he needed some tax advice. The firm ended up doing all of the legal work for the Hard Rock for years.

You just never know . . .

Walter D. James III, Texas

Lots of reasons: all of my clients are referrals and aren't likely to go elsewhere if they can't just show up on my doorstep. I do family court work, so no chance of turning away a million-dollar case. I have an office share; the staff here do not work for me and I'm not going to ask them to entertain someone for hours until I am available. Finally, I'm out of the office 40-50% of the time in court, meetings, or mediation.

Suzanne Hawkins

You need to set rules and have them followed. If you were to let the surviving spouse into your office without an appointment, then everyone else who had a multi-million case would come to your office without an appointment. Make them annoy some other attorney.

Bert Krages, Oregon

What and miss unscheduled amusement. I once had a group walk in. They were referred by the local bar association. Which does tell them to call first. they didn't. The crowd just piled in. Then the yammering began. I finally restored order. I determined they all lacked standing. Given their story and appearance I refer to them as the Springer show.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

Yeah, well, that pretty much happened with my last PI case: previous client walked in the door, asked me to do up a deed, I took info which took about 5 minutes, and being polite, I asked him how he was doing; he said he was doing better after that accident last year; I said, oh, what happened; he said he was crossing US 441 in the crosswalk, had right of way, and some senior citizen mowed him down in front of the The Villages Hospital; in spite of being at the hospital they Lifeflighted him to Shands ICU and he spent 2 weeks there. I said, Wow. I said, you talk to a lawyer? He said he had called MegaPIFirm who will remain nameless (but they're "For the People"), intake attorney asked if he had any broken bones, he said no, they said 'Not interested". Said, you mind if I send you to another lawyer? He said, sure, took info, emailed to my local PI attorney who met with him and signed him up and sent me email of "Good Case!!!".

Look, it depends, how busy am I? If I'm hot and heavy in the middle of drafting a motion or brief, I'm going to give them a card and ask them to call, if it's something I'm interested in. If it's something I don't do, I'll politely decline and if I have a name I'll give them one; if I'm not super busy and it's something that I do, I'll talk to them; maybe even conduct an on the spot interview.

I will say, walk ins saved my butt my first 6 months in practice, I was newly opened office next to the Salvation Army Thrift shop, located on CR 25, AKA "DUI Alley"

and between the husbands popping their head in while wife was at thrift shop and asking "Do you do wills?" and other people popping in and saying "Oh I saw your sign [which was simply a big white sign saying "ATTORNEY 347-2288"] that floated my practice until I got some people coming in from advertisements.

Ronald Jones, Florida

Over the years, I've had a number of clients hire me, because they were going through the phone book and calling attorneys, and I was the first attorney they were actually able to talk to. All previous calls either dumped them into voicemail, or took a message. I've also had walk-ins that were of the tin-foil hat type.

Yes, it depends on the area and the practice type.

But I'd like to think that - most of the time - I'm willing to give someone 5-10 minutes. Perhaps that means I'm not busy enough.... in which case, I'm glad I'm not busy enough.

Laurie Axinn Gienapp, Massachusetts

Yeah, you get your share of tin hats in walk ins and answering your own phone; the guy who wanted to sue a judge for foreclosing on his house when he stopped paying the mortgage because he was having a pissing contest with his wife; you deal with them.

I understand, I do, the desire to prescreen via voice mail or receptionist or what have you; sometimes people are time wasters. But on that PI case I mentioned, the last PI case I had prior to that one involved me answering the phone, some guy in Pensacola calling about his mom in Summerfield who had been driving on 441 and got broadsided by some guy turning out of a turn lane; she was unable to drive after the accident and he was looking for an attorney; he got me off of my blog. I said, gee, d'ya mind if I send you to another attorney; he said, that's fine; I took info, gave him my PI's guy phone number and info and emailed Lawyer Tim an outline of the case; I got 25% of what Tim made off of it.

Which brings me to my next point; yeah, I get you might not do PI work; so what? If your jurisdiction allows referral fees, cultivate a relationship with a good PI type. You

are going to get inquiries; from walk ins, from phone calls, and some existing or former clients. Make the referrals; make the money.

My biggest initial practice mistake was, when I opened my wills and probate store front office that I detail below, I'd have people come in and call in and say "Do you do accident cases" and I'd say, uh, no, I don't why'nt you call Morgan, Colling and Gilbert, you know the guys who advertise their "For the People". Had I said, wait a minute, let me take some info, and sent them to a PI attorney who paid referral fees, I could have made a significant amount of money; because I had maybe a dozen people that first year looking for accident work.

Ronald Jones
