

Things Clients Say

1. File a complaint against my adversary. He won't hire a lawyer. He will settle.
2. Send the demand letter to my adversary. He won't hire a lawyer. He will settle.
3. I am absolutely certain that the events x, y, and z happened as I have told you. No one will say otherwise.

And your clients say ...?

Roger Rosen, California

I don't care about the money. It's the principle.

V.K. Vandaveer, Washington, D.C.

Oh man.. this thread has so much potential win written all over it. I could go all day long, but here's some of my favorites (note: I practice PI, crimdef, etc)

1. *phone rings* "Heard anything from the insurance company yet?" x50 -- per day, it seems like anyway.
2. "That police report is wrong - <victim/officer/witness> is related to <officer/judge> and has clout/pull."
3. *after ENORMOUSLY convoluted 30+ min fact pattern, I give my opinion* "Yeah, that's what my lawyer told me.. I just wanted to double check."
4. *during intake* "So, about how much money will I get?"
5. *re: non-contingency case such as divorce/custody etc* "Can I do a payment plan of \$50/month?"
6. "He/she posted X, Y, and Z on Facebook and therefore is relevant because <irrelevant reason>"
7. "Lawyer X down the road got <relative> \$n for their car wreck case!"
8. "Can I get a loan against my case?" (me: uh, not from me) "BUT LAWYER X LOANS HIS CLIENTS MONEY ALL THE TIME!"
9. *string of loosely related facts that are beyond impossible to objectively prove* "..so do I have a case?"
10. "<medical provider> violated my HIPAA rights, how much can I sue for?"

..and that's just scratching the surface haha

Seth Combs, Kentucky

"We have conducted our own trademark search and the mark is available."

Heather Balmat, Virginia

"WE can beat this case. I did some research online last night.."

"I've been talking to this dude in here (JAIL), and we don't think you're working my case right."

"I know it's only a fractured pinky toe and wrist, but I want to clear at least 200k" - real client, slip and fall.

"Don't mention the settlement against the bar. I'm not paying Blue Cross s*^t!" - also real client who wanted me to stiff the hospital that put his leg back together after a drunk driver hit him. Also, didn't think I really earned my fee off the dram shop policy limits settlement because screw logic.

I love people.

Clark V. Stewart, Alabama

Along the lines of that last one, "I think you should reduce your fee because you work by yourself and not at a real law firm." This was after 6 law firms turned down her minimum impact case and I got the case resolved for policy limits

Jonathan Stein, California

I don't need a hazard insurance policy, I am paying cash for the house.

I don't need a title insurance policy, this is a new house and subdivision that has been searched a hundred times.

The lender said that I don't need to pay for a survey. [Title insurance company is providing survey coverage for lender, *not* buyer.]

The lender said that I don't need to pay for a termite report or home inspection.

I could go on.

It is a new house. I don't need a home inspection or survey.

The lender said they sent the loan package. They did -- to underwriting, *not* to the closing attorney.

Jim Pardue, North Carolina

Every single estate planning client, no matter how many spouses, children, business entities, assets, etc. they have, "I have a simple estate".

David A. Shulman, Florida

Yeah, "All I need is a simple will."

Ronald Jones, Florida

"It's just a simple divorce, no kids. "

Pro tip: it's never a simple divorce.

Grace Crivello

"We've already written the agreement ourselves and signed it. "

Usually poorly written and someone wants to take it back anyway. Or they try to enforce it and realize it can't be enforced the way they want because ... poorly written.

Elizabeth Pugliese, Maryland

The agreement seems very standard so I can sign it, right?

Paul Cohen

"I don't understand why I have to go to court for marijuana possession, it's legal in Colorado"

Jason Komninos, New Jersey

Or its close cousin--"I'll write the agreement, you can just review it."

Kevin W. Grierson, Virginia

I already wrote it. I just need you to look it over.

Mitchell Goldstein, Virginia

I just want a simple will. Nothing complicated.

Susan Hartman

[phone rings - cold call] "Hey, do you have a minute to answer a couple of questions?"

John D. Kitch, Tennessee

"Sure. I'll pull up my billing app while you get out your debit card."

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr., North Carolina

"If my Wife/Husband doesn't know about this secret bank account/bag of cash, I don't have to disclose it when we respond to discovery, right?"

"The judge ordered me to take a hair follicle/urine test? Damn... wait, nevermind, I have someone that can take care of it for me. Uh... just kidding...you're my attorney so you can't disclose this, right?"

T. Ryan Phillips, South Carolina

It has gotten so bad that when someone says they downloaded an agreement from the internet I start twitching. I have also told them when they do the "We just need you to review it" thing that it would be cheaper to just have me start from scratch because what they did would take so long to fix its faster to do it all over.

They don't believe me. I go through each paragraph and point out why it won't fly in a Maryland court. They then say "Oh that doesn't matter, we know what we want and we agreed to do it." Yeah but that's not what this SAYS. And you're splitting up. Let's talk about how you always agree with the other one.

Elizabeth Pugliese

The last time I had this one, it was a [divorce] property settlement agreement. She wanted me to review it before she signed it.

"We downloaded an agreement from a website."

- "OK, it says it's 11 pages, which is probably a lot of stuff you don't need. And pages 8 and 9 are missing."

"Oh, those didn't apply to us."

- "Not even the second half of the incomplete paragraph at the bottom of page 7, and the rest of the paragraph that goes with the three words on the top of page 10?"

“Can’t you just cross those out?”

- “First, No. And second, he already signed it and had it notarized, and there’s no way to know whether the pages were in it when he signed. And third, No.”

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr.

I will not 'review' a client drafted document, a contract, a deed, a will, a settlement agreement, whatever. I learned this lesson very early on; I was open a month or two and had a woman contact me about this "rent to own" contract that she had signed and the buyer had defaulted under. I had her come in, and she showed me this DIY fill in the blank real estate lease; it was OK, not what I would do, but it was OK. She had ran it past another attorney and he had told her it was adequate. And it was. The problem WAS, however, she and the person renting the property then proceeded to cross a bunch of stuff out, start handwriting provisions, and essentially changed it from a lease to, frankly, I don't know what the heck it was. Point is, even if a lawyer reviews and approves it, there's nothing to guarantee that client isn't going to chop stuff out and change the terms.

As an aside, I had prepared a Lease with Option to Purchase for a client; she signed it and all was well. Same client, several years later, decided to 'recycle' the contract, because, hey, she had the lawyer prepared contract. She proceeded to chop out pages and sections and hand write stuff in and have tenant sign it and then it winds up in litigation. It's an ongoing mess; I told her what she needed to do, she hired another lawyer, he screwed up the litigation, and she hired yet another lawyer.

Now, I will review stuff that clients are being asked to sign; mortgages, sales contracts, etc. I'm happy to do that, and charge relatively modest time based fee. But that's different.

Ronald Jones

I was once asked what the difference was between them using a form and an attorney doing it. I said the difference is that the attorney knows what it means and how to use it.

I have drafted my own documents before, but only when I knew what it all meant.

Mitchell P. Goldstein

Me: Yes. What is your second question?

Regardless of 2nd question: "I would be happy to address that when we meet. I charge \$XXX per hour. Can you come in next Tuesday at 2 p.m.? Please bring in all your paperwork.

Not really, but I do variants of this to separate the tire kickers.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

My practice is in large part "agreements from the internet" (open source licenses). So it probably will not surprise that the thing my clients say more than anything else is "but I didn't read that part of it."

Luis Villa, California

Client walks in at 8:40a "I need representation on this <criminal charge/speeding ticket/domestic violence petition/motion/etc) hearing I have."

Alright sure, we can discuss that - when is your hearing?

[brief silence] "...at 9."

Seth Combs

PC: I have an emergency hearing Monday morning at 9 and need a lawyer (this was 4 pm on Friday).

ME: When were you served?

PC: 4 weeks ago

ME: You can find one in the local bar down the street (where I was headed; it was a small bar, no pun intended)

Mitchell P. Goldstein

This has happened multiple times regarding drugs found in a defendant's pocket. Me: ³So, they found drugs in your pocket?² Client: ³They weren't my pants.² Me: "Whose pants were they?"² Client: ³My cousin's.² Me: ³What's your cousin's name?² Client: ³I don't know.²

Eric C. Davis, Alabama

"I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today."

Oh wait... that's J. Wellington Wimpy

P. Jayson Thibodaux

Had a client stiff me about \$500 on his fourth DUI - that I got dismissed instead of the mandatory jail time and felony. He'd message me about every six months and promise to pay me - about two days after I forgot about the jerk and how he screwed me. He'd comment on Facebook pictures (he's family) constantly.

The kicker was our birthdays are on the same day. This year he messaged me asking me to set his birthday on Facebook since he didn't know how and wanted everybody to message him his birthday greetings too. Oh, and to tell me he'd pay me soon. I. Love. People.

Clark V. Stewart

Because this keeps happening, client with zero retainer left emailing to say: "I have a quick question"

Then then question turns out to be a super nuanced legal issue that would take at least an hour to research.

Amanda L. Gordon, California

From my web page:

"I don't need a lawyer; I just have a quick question."

If you don't need a lawyer, why did you call a lawyer with your quick question? Perhaps you could have posed your question to a grocery clerk, or your dry cleaner. In the law, there are millions of quick questions. There are very few quick answers.

.You've heard it before: You get what you pay for. Attorneys are in the business of giving legal advice and providing legal support. Would you go to your butcher, choose just one pork chop, and hope to leave without paying, because you just needed a snack?

.Remember, too, that lawyers are people like you, with families, mortgages, and student loans. Our time, knowledge, and experience are the products we sell to make a living.

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr.

So I'm just getting started, but I'm already sick to death of....but when I Googled that...

Wendi Lawson See, South Carolina

That's just silly, Rick. Such questions are more properly posed on the Internet, not to a grocery clerk or a dry cleaner. Sheesh.

James S. Tyre, California

Oh yeah. "But I did a google search and it said ..."

Specific to family law "I have a friend who got divorce and he/she got X. I want X." They do not want to hear why they can't get X.

Elizabeth Pugliese

"I am not a lawyer but..."

Paul Cohen

In a similar vein, I get "Can they file for ____?"

Well, yes, they could file for ANYTHING, but that doesn't mean they're going to get it. Then you get the "typical lawyer answer" eyeroll.

Ryan Phillips

I usually say sure they can do anything they want. That doesn't mean doing it isn't recourse free.

I mean you CAN go out and murder someone, you're not supposed to, there are likely to be pretty serious consequences for doing it, but you can still do it

Erin M. Schmidt, Ohio

Another one of my favorites that I get in the domestic/family law arena is the many different variations of:

"My <spouse/bf or gf/partner> already signed his rights over to our kids, so he can't file for custody right?"

And, similarly but with a probate twist:

"Do you do wills?"

-Yes..

"OK good, because I want to do one and in it I want to leave custody of <children/grandchildren> to <X>."

-Well, unlike a car, an antique heirloom, or land, children have not been considered property since, oh the Civil War era or thereabouts? So, yeah, you can't transfer custody via will, chief.

Seth Combs

I swear this happened more than once:

Q: they say you robbed the corner store with a gun.

A: Noooo, man. I was in North Carolina, visiting my Grandmom. Wasn't me.

Q: Great. Anybody else with you?

A: Yeah, my cousin, Joe. He was with me at our Grandmom's house.

Q: Is Joe from around here? What's his last name?

A: I dunno, man. He's just my cousin, Joe. I don't know where he lives, exactly, and he's my Mom's sister's husband's nephew, so I'm not sure about his last name.

Q: OK, well, what's your Grandmom's name?

A: I just call her Grandmom! That's her name.

Q: Where does she live in North Carolina?

A: I dunno, exactly. But you know what?

Q: What?

A: My cousin Joe knows!

I call this the North Carolina defense!

Good luck.

Russ Carmichael

I think our clients are related.

Eric C. Davis

Russ -

I guess that's a fresh variation on the "street name" defense.

"My buddy let me wear his coat/pants/socks/beret/ascot, I didn't know there was a bag of dope in there!"

"What's your buddy's name?"

"I'm not going to snitch on him, but I don't know his name."

"How long have you known him?"

"Five years."

"And you don't know his name?"

"Well, everybody just calls him Snake/Blood/Killer/Buddy/Curly. I don't know his real name."

"Where does he live?"

"Around here somewhere, I don't know. I just see him at parties."

Sigh... and he let you borrow his pants, of course, which he just happened to have an extra pair in his car after you spilled mustard/ketchup/sriracha/hummus/gazpacho on yours.

Ryan Phillips

Oh hell! I literally just took a call and got one of my other frequently-heard "clientisms" that I completely forgot about:

"Hello, my name is <x> and my lawyer <I. Will Burnham, Esq.> is withdrawing from my case and I want to hire you to take over. Oh also there's a hearing coming up in the case in a week. How much will it cost to hire you?"

Me: Well first, if you don't mind my asking, why is your attorney withdrawing?

"Aww it's nothing really, I mean he did an OK job I guess, he's just withdrawing because I haven't paid him what I owe."

Me:ok, thanks but no thanks.

Seth Combs

I have recently started taking on family law cases and have already had a few crazy child custody questions: Grandmother wanted to know if I can file something to prevent Dad from seeing his young son after Dad moves out of town, "it's ok because my daughter agrees with me." Another was "if I avoid my boyfriend, I heard I can say he abandoned our kid [and lose rights to kid]." Amazed mostly at how one parent or grandparents want to create situation to cause other parent to lose custody, visitation.

Julie Mills

How about the potential client who calls you up and as soon as you get on the phone, they launch into a 30 minute explanation of their case and don't see to take a breath for you to stop them. But . . . But . . . but . . .
can I well . . . uh . . .

Robert Thurston

Chances are, they didn't pay careful attention to how you answered the phone. Try:

"Wow. I'm sorry, but the attorney's not available right now. Let me go ahead and schedule you for an appointment."

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr.

I've found that "Police report is wrong" is often accurate. Maybe it's just Indiana, but I've found that too many officers are really sloppy with their reports, getting wrong driver in wrong car, wrong street with stop sign, etc.

Steve Terrell, Indiana
