

Clients Who Demand a Response over the Weekend

A client emailed me on last night (Saturday night) asking about his case. Then this morning, he emailed me again and asked why I'm not responding to him.

Any suggestions on how to deal with this client? I already told him when he retained me that I respond to emails on the "next business day".

I do respond over the weekends, but if you don't want to I would ignore him completely until Monday and then respond substantively without even mentioning the "delay".

Shell Bleiweiss, Illinois

Don't respond until Monday-----and then when he asks why explain to him the meaning of the phrase "next business day"

Dave Rakowski, Pennsylvania

If first time, I would look at it as an opportunity to train client. Unless matter is urgent, I would respond tomorrow per your cited policy. I would address client's question and then repeat policy as a reminder.

If client is overly needy, or untrainable, I would make other decisions, including whether to continue with client if pattern of behavior develops. What I would not do is give in and respond.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

Engage your Out-of-office messaging system at 5:30 every Friday night with the note that all emails that came in after that time and over the weekend will be addressed on Monday. You can still respond to whomever you want but you can be selective. Hope this helps.

Lyza L. Sandgren, Paralegal, Georgia

Edit future retainer agreements to state that calls/emails received over the weekend will not be returned until Monday.

Brian C. Hagner, Wisconsin

Sliding scale. Are you going to make a lot of money on the case or is it otherwise really important? The more important the case, the slacker to cut the client. Training the client, yes, but many of us are pretty much 24/7 or so due to cell phones. Hence the "no cell phone Sunday" of last month. And was the client's inquiry about something truly urgent? I take inquiries and respond at all times, as a misguided, old school, former big firm view of professionalism, but that is probably my mistake.

"I believe the theory that a person accomplishes as much working 50 hours a week as 60 hours or more per week, and in the long term is healthier limiting his working hours and taking portions of the weekend off. That is why I have a policy of returning calls and emails by the next business day, and not the same day on weekends, unless the situation is urgent."

Roger M. Rosen, California

As others have suggested, it depends upon many factors - such as the value of the case to the firm, if this is a repeat offender, etc.

In general, I'd suggest waiting until Monday morning to reply back at all. Then politely remind him of your communications policy, and proceed to answer his question.

One awesome tool I use now is Boomerang. It's a Gmail add-on (maybe available for other email, not sure) that lets you schedule emails to go out in the future. So you can reply to the client today to get it out of your inbox, but it won't be SENT to him until whenever you specify. :)

I've used this to help train some clients who started using email as a chat service - they'd send an email and I happened to be available to reply right away, then they'd start expecting that. Boomerang lets me do the reply whenever I want but schedule it to go out when it's a good time.

It's also handy when you want to email someone something that's NOT urgent and not interrupt their weekend if you know they email over the weekend.

Finally, you can tell it to return an email to you ("Boomerang" it) in a certain number of days if there's no reply. Great way to keep tabs on people who are bad at replying to emails.

Andrew Flusche, Virginia

As Roger said, it depends on the value of a case. I give my clients my cell phone number and tell them to text me if they need something, but to understand I don't respond often during the weekend. I had a client who waited until Saturday to sign her release. She had questions. Happy to answer them so I can get my money. But, another client had general questions about her case. I sent her a text back that said I was unavailable during the weekend and we could talk on Monday.

A lot of it is setting client expectations.

Jonathan Stein, California

What everybody else said, and if he objects fire him.

Randy Birch, Utah

Is it hourly or contingency work?

How does your engagement letter address email correspondence?

Michael J. Sweeney, Connecticut

Some really great suggestions here. This is contingency, case is over, client is asking when I'm going to mail his settlement check to him. Of course, I already explained all that in a long email last week. I understand, he's anxious to get his money, but I think I'm going to wait until tomorrow AM to respond (to tell him what I already told him). Otherwise, I get the feeling he's going to be emailing every hour 24/7 (and I'll be saying the same thing) until the check is in his hands.

That boomerang program sounds very cool.

Eugene Lee, California

Well, you are not going to receive the check on a Sunday.

Monday:

"In my experience, it takes about X weeks to receive the settlement check in a case like this. As soon as it comes in I will let you know, as I too would like to get paid and I need you to authorize the final distribution of funds. So I will let you know as soon as the check comes in. As you may recall, my policy is to respond to emails within one business day. Thank you for your patience."

Roger M. Rosen

In such a case, where I have already provided the answer, I would simply "forward" my Sent copy of the e-mail that already answered the question(s) back to the client, add no further commentary, and highlight the answer in the earlier message, to point out that I've already answered, and he'd make better use of his time actually reading the information you gave him.

It's what I would do, and what I have done on a number of occasions.

-Rick

(PS – If you use Outlook, you can schedule when mail and responses will be sent, in addition to setting an autoresponder, as others have noted.)

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr., North Carolina

I had a client call me Thursday. Demanding I do something about their case. I informed them that I was moving (home) and I'd deal with it Monday.

Ironically, it's a landlord-tenant case. Later that afternoon she called me and asked when the lease was up would she have to give the tenants another lease. What part of evicting your tenant do you understand.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

If the case is settling then I assume you have been working with this client for some time now.

If so, it seems reasonable the client would expect that you communicate the way you have been. If in the past he emailed and you responded on weekends, then that is what he expects now as well. If this is the first time he emailed you on a weekend, then respond as people have stated, i.e. answer on Monday.

Robert Weiss