

When contractors dispute working hours with clients

A contractor will find that clients often demand extra work hours. Perhaps the project is just running late? Or perhaps the manager has committed to a target and wants you to help achieve it, regardless of when you work?

A Little Is Okay...

Of course, some contractors are paid by the hour, and so don't have to raise an issue here. But if they don't want to work longer hours, what follows applies to them too.

No one minds doing a little extra work, but demands for a little here for now and a little there for later may soon become a lot here and there all the time.

Contractors should both manage client expectations in regard to working extra hours, and also should know their rights.

Legal Rights

Legal rights are explained by [David Royden](#), a lawyer specialising in contract law with Laytons Solicitors in Manchester: "Your contract is a guide to how long you should work--it should be stated in the contract, or should be based on trade standards--but you may be expected reasonably to work longer hours even if the contract doesn't stipulate that you should."

Royden explains that working longer hours can be standard practice in some trades. In journalism, for example, one may be obliged to follow stories from early morning until late at night, regardless of how long the contract working day stipulates. That is just a function of the news business--news happens all the time without regard to journalist contracts--and you have to accept that as part of the job. You should make it clear to the manager that you are doing this for goodwill--let him know that you are thinking about it.

“ You may be expected reasonably to work a few longer hours even if the contract does not stipulate that you should ”

David Royden-Laytons Solicitors

Be Flexible, but Be Fair

Contractors are, like journalists, expected to be a little flexible when it comes to working hours. But if you find that you are being asked to work every weekend, or every day until midnight, and you're not being paid for it, you should take two actions.

1. Find out what other contractors of your type do, both on this job, and in general;
2. Talk to your manager to control expectations.

On some jobs, you will find that your colleagues shrug off a few hours here and there. You should then do the same, as being a stickler under these circumstances is clearly inappropriate, and probably not legally justified.

Manage Expectations

On the other hand, if you find that the demand for extra hours is regular, talk to the manager and explain that you don't expect to do this every week, or every day, or whatever may be the case. The manager will then either threaten you, saying you have to work them regardless, or cajole you saying that you will be rewarded in some other way for doing it.

Neither approach should cut much ice with you.

Says Royden: "You should never provide more than is reasonably required by your contract. Make that clear to the manager, and stick to it."

Sometimes the manager will have committed to a target, and will then pressure you for extra hours to complete it. Make it clear to the manager that certain tasks require a certain amount of time, and that you won't do it regularly. You can of course offer to do the extra work provided the client rewards you accordingly.

“ But you should never provide more than is reasonably demanded by your contract ”

David Royden-Laytons Solicitors

But Correct Your Mistakes

There is one exception to all this: when you blow it!

If you've made a mistake, then do work the extra hours needed to correct it. That's just something that professional contractors do.

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