

# The Future of Legal Services: Unbundled Services

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There is a new concept in the legal industry called unbundled services. It is largely unknown by lawyers. But it has appeared in the attorney-ethical rules of many states. Most consumers have never heard of it. Most lawyers still have no idea of what it means. But the influence of this concept may change the future of legal services.

To understand the concept of unbundled services, one must have an understanding of the traditional ways attorneys handle representation. For most of history an attorney began representation at the beginning of a case. Representation didn't end until the end of the case. People needing legal services had two choices: either pay an attorney a fee for the entire case, or go it alone. There was no in-between. It was almost unthinkable for an attorney to provide help filling out one form or attending one hearing. It was all or nothing. There was nothing wrong with this system for those with the substantial assets needed to pay an attorney. But people that did not have much money were out of luck.

Many local state bar associations recognized this problem. The issue was recently studied by the American Bar Association. A new concept was borne out of these studies – unbundled services. The basic premise was that some legal advice was better than no legal advice. Unbundled services recognized the reality of many consumers – that attorney fees exceeded the financial capability of many. Unbundled services solved this problem. This concept makes it acceptable for an attorney to represent a client for one small part of their case – without violating ethical rules. Many states have started to adopt rules recognizing the existence of unbundled services.

The most promising application is for family law services such as divorce, child custody, support, and property distribution. The reason: more people attempt to handle their own family law cases than any other area of law. And the courts are increasing frustrated and bogged down with self-represented divorce parties. The need for flexibility and creativity in legal service is the most evident in family law cases.

Unfortunately, attorneys have been slow to offer unbundled services. They are either not aware of this new trend or have declined to change their service offerings. The result: over three quarters of family law cases involve people that have not hired an attorney. There are strong advantages for attorneys that offer unbundled services: a larger potential customer base, less collection problems, and the satisfaction of helping lower income clients.

If you cannot afford an attorney, consider searching for an attorney that will offer different services on an “a la cart” basis. This can include preparing the initial divorce documents, attending one hearing, or participating in mediation. Do it yourselfers can also enlist the help of an attorney to prep for their final hearing. The era of unbundled services has arrived and will ultimately empower the consumer and increase access to the court system.

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An example of unbundled services can be found at Tampa Divorce Fees