

From Apologetic to Advocate

The 4-Part Billing Framework
& Mindset Shift

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The Billing Coach

Meet Your Billing Coach



Molly Kremer, Esq.
The Billing Coach



- Former BigLaw Litigator
- 16+ years of civil litigation experience
- Certified Life Coach (2021)
- Founder: Molly Kremer Coaching, LLC — “The Billing Coach”



My Billing Confession

“I used to work 9-hour days and only bill 4–5 hours.”

I felt guilty, uncertain, and I didn’t know how to describe my work.

That changed when I discovered the mindset tools and billing frameworks I’ll share today.

Today's Roadmap

1

Understanding the Problem —
Why attorneys underbill



2

The 4-Part Billing Framework —
Action | Task |
Value | Result



3

Practical Applications —
Emails, thinking
time & more



4

Mindset Transformation
— From apologetic
to advocate

5

Implementation
— Your action
plan for immediate
results



The Hidden Cost of Lost Time



10 timekeepers = **\$437,500** in lost revenue per year

Your Goals for Today



-  Identify your specific billing time leaks
-  Master the 4-Part Billing Narrative Framework
-  Bill confidently for emails, thinking time & internal communications
-  Shift from apologetic billing to advocating for your time
-  Leave with actionable strategies you can implement TODAY

1

Understanding the Problem

Apologetic Billing Behavior

The pattern most attorneys don't realize they have

What Is Apologetic Billing?

Unconsciously apologizing for your billable time through your actions — failing to bill for valuable work because you're uncertain if it's "truly billable" or don't know how to describe it.

? Sound familiar? You're not alone.

This is one of the most common challenges attorneys face — and it's completely fixable.

Common Areas Affected



Internal communications



Strategic thinking



Extended research



Case organization



Routine client interactions



Follow-up & next steps

The Thoughts Behind Underbilling

Do any of these sound familiar?

"I can't bill for that"

"The client probably wouldn't want to pay for this"

"This was just a quick interaction"

"I'm just thinking, not producing anything"

"That took too long; I should cut some time"

"I'm not sure if this is billable"

"Other attorneys wouldn't bill for this"

"I'm not efficient enough at this yet"

**These feel like facts — but they're just thoughts.
And thoughts can change.**

Three Major Barriers to Billing

1



Over-Prioritizing Legal Work

Viewing time entry as
“administrative” rather than an
essential professional
responsibility.

You think: “The real work comes
first.”

But billing IS real work.

2



Prioritizing Others' Needs

Responding to emails and
requests feels urgent; billing
yourself does not.

You respond to everyone except
yourself.

3



Perfectionism About Tomorrow

Believing you'll magically have
better billing habits
“tomorrow.”

The “perfectionism fantasy”:
future-you never shows up with
better skills.

Redefining Billable Time

The Definition That Changes Everything

Billable time is time spent adding value to a matter that moves the case forward (however slight)

OLD THINKING

"Is this category of work billable?"



NEW THINKING

"Did what I did add value by moving this matter forward?"



2

The 4-Part ATVR Billing Framework

A systematic approach to capturing the true value of your legal work



What you did:

The verb describing your work (e.g., Analyze, Draft, Strategize).

What it's for:

The specific legal task or document (e.g., Motion, Deposition, Memo).

Why it matters:

How this benefits the case or client (e.g., to identify risks, to strengthen position).

The end goal:

The deliverable or objective (e.g., for summary judgment, for trial prep).

Use this framework to construct powerful, value-driven billing narratives.

Value Comes in Many Forms



STRATEGIC Value

- Thinking, planning, analysis
- Case strategy sessions
- Mental preparation
- Risk assessment



PROCEDURAL Value

- Organization, coordination
- Calendaring deadlines
- File management
- Team alignment



SUBSTANTIVE Value

- Research, drafting, review
- Motion drafting
- Document analysis
- Legal research



RELATIONAL Value

- Communication, counseling
- Client updates
- Relationship building
- Counseling services

2

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ACTION: What You Are Doing



ACTION = The verb describing what you did



Pro Tip: Pair verbs together — “Review AND analyze” captures more of the mental work involved

TASK: The “What” You Are Focusing On

The specific item or objective that occupies your attention at any given moment.

Examples of “WHAT”:



Email



Document



Brief



Motion



Contract



Case Law

VALUE & RESULT: The Missing Pieces

These are what most attorneys leave out — and it costs them



VALUE: Why It Matters

How this action benefited the case:

Questions to Find Your Value:

- Why am I doing this right now?
- Why does this matter to the case?
- What problem am I solving?

Value Phrases:

- to identify potential risks
- to strengthen negotiating position
- to protect privileged information
- to advance client's objectives
- to facilitate early case resolution



RESULT: The End Goal

The deliverable or strategic objective:

Questions to Find Your Result:

- To what end?
- What will this work produce?
- What's the next step this enables?

Result Phrases:

- for summary judgment motion
- for client status update
- for discovery deadline compliance
- for trial preparation
- for settlement negotiations

Transformation: Before & After



BEFORE (Task-Focused)

"Review and summarize Acme Inc. background documentation."

(2.5 hours)

Invites scrutiny: What were you doing for 2.5 hours?



AFTER (Value-Focused)

"Analyze and evaluate financial statements of Acme Inc. to identify potential legal and regulatory issues and strategize for handling of same."

(2.5 hours)

Justifies time through clear strategic value

Transformation: Before & After



BEFORE (Task-Focused)

"Prepare Plaintiff's deposition outline"

(2.5 hours)

Invites scrutiny: What were you doing for 2.5 hours?



AFTER (Value-Focused)

"Plan and prepare for Plaintiff A. Smith's deposition, including defense question outline, to secure favorable admissions and limit damaging testimony for strategic advantage in subsequent proceedings"

(2.5 hours)

Justifies time through clear strategic value

3

Practical Applications



Billing for Email Communications



Email = Professional exchange requiring legal judgment



Require legal training or professional judgment to compose



Provide substantive information or guidance to clients



Advance the matter or prevent potential problems



Represent professional service clients would pay for separately

Pro Tip: Use “correspondence” instead of “email” in your narratives — it elevates perception.

Email Billing Narratives: Examples

VAGUE

“Review and respond to client email”

What email? About what? What value did you provide?



VALUE-FOCUSED

“Review, Analyze and respond to client correspondence regarding discovery deadlines to identify potential risks associated with case in preparation responding to Plaintiff’s discovery.”

Clear action, specific task, explicit value

Billing for Internal Communications

Internal discussions = Strategic development



Strategic Collaboration

Partner consultations that improve client representation



Knowledge Transfer

Discussions that bring specialized expertise to matters



Quality Assurance

Reviews that identify risks and improve work product



Matter Coordination

Team alignment that prevents conflicts and missed deadlines

→ Example Transformation



VAGUE

"Meeting with partner about case"



VALUE-FOCUSED

"Strategize and evaluate litigation team's approach to deposition of P. Smith to secure strategic advantage in ongoing discovery and appropriate response for same."

Pro Tip: Use "strategize" and "evaluate" instead of "discuss" or "confer with."

Billing for Thinking Time

Strategic thinking = Your HIGHEST-VALUE service



Analytical Processing
Breaking down complex
facts and legal issues



Strategic Development
Formulating case
theory and approach



Problem-Solving
Identifying risks and
creative solutions



Judgment Formation
Making professional
recommendations



**Strategic thinking =
Your HIGHEST-VALUE service**

*The document is the artifact.
The THINKING is the value.*



***If it moved the case forward
mentally, it's billable.***

Thinking Time: Example Narratives

1



Strategic Analysis

"Analyze and evaluate strategic options for upcoming summary judgment motion to identify dispositive legal issues and preparation for alternative scenarios."

2



Mental Preparation

"Prepare and strategize for judicial questioning during oral argument to build credibility with the court and preparation for alternative scenarios."

3



Out-of-Office Thinking

"Evaluate and assess settlement proposal terms to identify potential risks associated with case and implications for future proceedings."

The Billing Bookends Framework

Every task has valuable work BEFORE and AFTER



Before-Task Bookends

- Evaluate the propriety of...
- Analyze appropriate response to...
- Strategize the legal implications of...
- Assess outstanding issues regarding...
- Plan approach for handling...



After-Task Bookends

- Evaluate appropriate follow-up...
- Analyze and assess finalized work...
- Strategize further handling...
- Identify next steps based on...
- Prepare recommendations re...

For Paralegals: Your Blueprint



ACTIONS

- Review
- Organize
- Compile
- Index
- Summarize
- Prepare
- Track



VALUES

- to ensure timely filing
- to facilitate attorney review
- to meet deadlines
- to support organization
- to maintain accuracy



RESULTS

- for discovery compliance
- for court submission
- for trial exhibits
- for case management
- for deposition prep

4

Mindset Transformation



The Self-Coaching Model

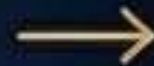
How your thoughts create your billing results



Circumstance



Thought



Feeling



Action



Result

Example:

C: 20-minute discussion with partner about case strategy

T: "I can't bill for internal discussions"

F: Frustrated, resigned, uncertain

A: Don't bill for the conversation

R: 0.3 hours of valuable time lost — and proof that "I can't bill for that"

The Better Billing Model

Same circumstance — different thought, different result



Circumstance



Thought



Feeling



Action



Result

Example:

C: 20-minute discussion with partner about case strategy

T: "This discussion added strategic value to my client's case"

F: Confident, clear, justified

A: Write a value-focused narrative and enter the time

R: 0.3 hours captured — and proof that your work has value

Bridge Thoughts: Changing Your Mind

Transitional beliefs that feel believable right now

"I can't bill for that"



"How might this add value and move the case forward?"

"This took too long"



"How might this time have been necessary?"

"These are just quick emails"



"How are these moving the case forward?"

"I was just thinking"



"How did this lead to better strategy?"

"I'm not efficient enough yet"



"What if my pace is appropriate for this stage?"

The “Bill Without Apology” Technique

1

ACKNOWLEDGE The Impulse



Notice the urge to discount, minimize, or skip the entry entirely. **Name it:** “There’s the apology impulse.”

Takeaway: Recognition is the first step to change.

2

BILL Anyway



Enter the full time despite discomfort. Use the ATVR framework to describe the value you provided.

Takeaway: Action builds confidence, not the other way around.

3

CREATE Evidence



Each time you bill without apologizing, you prove to yourself your work deserves compensation.

Takeaway: You are creating proof of your value.

4

BUILD Momentum



Each instance makes the next one easier. Action creates confidence – not the other way around.

Takeaway: Consistent action leads to lasting change.

The Anchoring Advantage Technique



What If My Time Gets Cut?

Cutting your own time is above your pay grade

YOUR JOB



Capture the value you provided with accurate, detailed narratives using the ATVR framework.

Enter everything. Describe it well.

THEIR JOB



Make final billing decisions based on:

- ⚙️ Client relationships you can't see
- ⚙️ Fee arrangements you don't know about
- ⚙️ Strategic considerations across matters
- ⚙️ Budget context you don't have

When you pre-cut your time, partners can't see the full picture of how cases are being worked.

A large, ornate gold frame with a double-line border. Inside the frame, on the left, is a large gold number '5'. To the right of the '5' is a vertical decorative line with a central diamond and symmetrical flourishes. To the right of this line is the word 'Implementation' in a gold serif font. The background is a dark blue gradient with subtle wavy patterns in the corners.

5

Implementation

Your Immediate Action Plan

1



Identify your top 3
time leaks — where
are you losing
unbilled time?

Today

2



Create ATVR
narratives for
those scenarios
using the framework

This Week

3



Practice the
Anchoring
Advantage for
your next 5 tasks

Next 5 Days

4



Choose one
bridge thought
and practice it
consistently

Ongoing

Leveraging AI for Better Billing

Sample Prompt



"Using the billing principles as reference, generate a billing narrative for: A 30-minute discussion with a senior partner about strategy for responding to opposing counsel's motion to dismiss. We evaluated potential counterarguments and discussed which cases would be most persuasive.

Please avoid using terms like: 'confer,' 'discuss,' 'interoffice communication.'"



AI-Generated Result



- 0.2** *Analyze and evaluate strategic options for opposition to motion to dismiss.*
- 0.2** *Identify and assess strength of potential counterarguments.*
- 0.3** *Research relevant precedential authorities to maximize persuasive impact in forthcoming response brief.*

AI tools can help you generate value-focused narratives — especially when you're learning the ATVR framework.

Practice Exercise: **Your Turn!**



THE SCENARIO:



You spent 45 minutes reviewing and responding to 6 client emails about upcoming deposition schedule, witness availability, and questions about document preparation.

Write your ATVR narrative:

Sample Answer:



"Review, evaluate and respond to client correspondence regarding issues surrounding deposition of plaintiff to ensure proper compliance with court mandated discovery deadlines"

Common Billing Narrative Mistakes

Mistakes



Block billing



Vague verbs



Missing the value



Skipping small tasks



Delayed billing

Best Practices



Break into separate entries showing distinct value



Use specific professional language: **“analyze,” “evaluate,” “strategize”**



Always include **WHY** it matters with “to” statements



Track everything — 6-minute tasks add up to hours



Bill **contemporaneously** while details are fresh

The Real Cost: Your Time & Your Life



125+

Hours Per Year

= 3 Work Weeks of Overwork

What would YOU do with 3 extra weeks?



Time with family



Mental wellness



Exercise & health



Hobbies & passions



Actual rest



Real vacation



**Bill your time accurately → Work smarter,
not longer → Get your life back**

Key Takeaways



You're losing at least 30 min/day — now you know where to find it



ATVR Framework:
Action | Task | Value | Result



Emails, internal comms, thinking time = **ALL billable**



Your thoughts create your billing behavior — change the thought, change the result



Action creates confidence — bill without apology

Your Resources



The Billing Blueprint —
Quick reference
with ATVR
components



The Billing Bluebook —
Full narrative
examples by
litigation phase



**Billing Beliefs
Basics
Workbook** —
Self-coaching
exercises for
mindset



**Today's Slide
Deck** — Full
presentation for
your reference



**AI Narrative
Generator
Prompts** — For
billing bookends and
multi-phase work

A large, glowing golden gear is positioned on the right side of the image, partially overlapping the text. The gear has a bright, warm glow emanating from its right edge. The background is a dark blue gradient with a subtle, larger gear pattern in the background.

Remember it's about
progress *not* perfection.



It's YOUR time.

**Make it
count.**

Questions?

Let's discuss what's on your mind



Your Commitment

What ONE thing will you do differently starting TODAY?



My commitment to myself:



Nothing changes if nothing changes.

Thank You!

Now go bill your time — without apology.



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