

Why It's Best to Have A Lawyer On the Other Side:

Dealing With Pro Se Plaintiffs &
Lawyer-Less Defendants


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**“Three things can happen when you
pass, and two of ‘em are bad.”**

-Darrell K. Royal

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Texas Disciplinary Rule of Professional Conduct 4.03

In dealing on behalf of a client with a person who is not represented by counsel, a lawyer shall not state or imply that the lawyer is disinterested.

When the lawyer knows or reasonably should know that the unrepresented person misunderstands the lawyer's role in the matter, the lawyer shall make reasonable efforts to correct the misunderstanding.

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Texas Disciplinary Rule of Professional Conduct 4.01

In the course of representing a client a lawyer shall not knowingly:

- (a) make a false statement of material fact or law to a third person; or
- (b) fail to disclose a material fact to a third person when disclosure is necessary to avoid making the lawyer a party to a criminal act or knowingly assisting a fraudulent act perpetrated by a client.

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ABA Model Rule 4.3

In dealing on behalf of a client with a person who is not represented by counsel, a lawyer shall not state or imply that the lawyer is disinterested.

When the lawyer knows or reasonably should know that the unrepresented person misunderstands the lawyer's role in the matter, the lawyer shall make reasonable efforts to correct the misunderstanding.

The lawyer shall not give legal advice to an unrepresented person, other than the advice to secure counsel, if the lawyer knows or reasonably should know that the interests of such a person are or have a reasonable possibility of being in conflict with the interests of the client.

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What is impermissible advice?

Whether a lawyer is giving impermissible advice may depend on the experience and sophistication of the unrepresented person, as well as the setting in which the behavior and comments occur.

“So long as the lawyer has explained that the lawyer represents an adverse party and is not representing the person, the lawyer may inform the person of the terms on which the lawyer's client will enter into an agreement or settle a matter, prepare documents that require the person's signature and explain the lawyer's own view of the meaning of the document or the lawyer's view of the underlying legal obligations.” ABA Model Rule 4.3, cmt. 2.

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