

I've Been Charged. What Can I Do To Help Myself?

Contributed by Tushar K. Pain
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Why me? How could I let this happen? If I could only go back and undo what I did. It is only natural to engage in this thought process when you've been charged with a criminal offence. Such sentiments may be echoing repeatedly in your mind. You may even feel that you cannot stop them. However, you must in order to help yourself.
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{bot_wrgoogle}Begin by recognizing that this thought process creates feelings of helplessness and is disempowering. If you are reading this, then you are likely seeking to understand your predicament and trying to gain some measure of control over the situation. This is a major step in the right direction.

Gaining control over your emotions and thought process is essential. It is the first step in the journey ahead. Doing this will allow you to think clearly and make effective decisions. Whatever has happened to bring you to this point has already transpired. There is no benefit to re-living it and judging yourself. Accept that it has happened. You now face a challenge that you must confront.

Take a piece of paper and write "To my lawyer" at the top of the page. This will preserve the privileged nature of the document. Write down in as much detail as possible (do not worry about including irrelevant facts) everything that happened during the incident that lead to the charge. If you feel there is relevant background information then include it. Also, make notes of any questions and concerns that come to mind. This exercise serves several purposes. It preserves your memory of the events that you may be required to testify to many months down the road. It gives your lawyer a complete and accurate understanding of the situation. It helps you clarify and articulate your thoughts.

The next task is to find the right lawyer. This may seem to be a formidable task. After all, what do you know about the law? Knowledge of the law is not something you need to find the right lawyer. You are able to determine whether you like someone. You are able to judge whether you like the person's approach. You are able to assess a person's communication skills. You are able to appreciate how much time that person has or has not spent with you. Use these factors to guide you. You have a lifetime of experience dealing with people. Rely on it. Trust your instincts. Trust yourself.

Keep the channels of communication open. A lack of communication between a lawyer and client often leads to misunderstandings and a breakdown in the relationship. It is the lawyer's responsibility to keep the client well-informed and updated on a regular basis. But you can and should pick up the phone anytime you have a question, a concern, an idea, or just want to know if there's been a development in your case. A good lawyer encourages this type of contact and will make himself available to his clients. Make sure your lawyer subscribes to this philosophy and take advantage of it. The more communication you have, the better

informed you and your lawyer will be. As a result, your lawyer will be able to provide more meaningful advice and you, in turn, will provide better instructions to your lawyer. In the end, you will be more satisfied with the level of service you receive from your lawyer.

Be proactive in the development of your case. Be prepared to be involved in the building of your defence. As brilliant as your lawyer may be, he does not have a first-hand knowledge of the facts. You do. You were there. The facts are everything. A good lawyer recognizes this and will set out to master the facts. To do this, he must involve you in the process. Review the evidence with your lawyer. Comment on what you agree with, what you disagree with, what you think might be missing. Share your ideas. You may come up with something your lawyer hasn't thought of.

Finally, maintain a positive attitude. Negative feelings will creep up from time to time. This is natural and to be expected. However, do not let them interfere with your focus. Simply acknowledge them then put them aside. A positive attitude will allow you to effectively process information and advice from your lawyer; to give proper instructions to your lawyer; to convey your concerns; and to generally be useful in your defence.

Keep in mind, as bad as it seems now, you will get through this.

About The Author

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