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## KNOW EVERY DOCUMENT AND PIECE OF EVIDENCE IN YOUR FILE

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### KNOW EVERY DOCUMENT AND PIECE OF EVIDENCE IN YOUR FILE

Knowing every document and piece of evidence in your case file is imperative to competent preparation of your case. While this may sound obvious, many attorneys fail to follow this advisement to their own peril. The reasons for knowing your case file in and out are threefold: (1) you want to be the case master, (2) you do not want to be caught off-guard, and (3) your reputation is on the line.

First, let's start with why it is important to take on the role of case master. A case master is an attorney who has reviewed everything in their file and has thorough knowledge of the details. Typically, this attorney will come to be relied upon by the court, the jurors, and the court clerks, because they are confident in their knowledge of the case and are able to swiftly provide precise information when requested by any party. A case master can easily be spotted when opposing counsel does not have a firm grasp on the facts or their file. For example, when opposing counsel is struggling to pinpoint an exact date or time during a hearing, the court master can rapidly provide those answers to the judge, who, in turn, comes to rely on that attorney for information inquiries



going forward. The person who can consistently provide accurate answers, when asked, is the person who becomes the case master.

Next, you never want to be caught off-guard when it comes to your own case. If your case has a weakness, you better know about it. If your case has investigation that could strengthen it, you better know how and when you need that completed by. This type of case involvement will positively assist you in negotiations, pre-trial motions, trial practice, sentencing, and beyond. While it may be painstaking, turning every page in your file is critical. As an example, I observed a criminal case where the defense attorney indicated that the investigating officer did not articulate reasonable suspicion for stopping his client's vehicle. The defense attorney went on for about five minutes before the judge turned to the prosecutor and asked whether there was any articulated reason for the stop. The prosecution calmly told the judge that the officer had written notes on the back of the traffic ticket and that defense counsel was in possession of this evidence. On the other side of counsel table, the defense attorney flipped the ticket over in his hand and said, "Huh," as if he had just discovered this information. As you can imagine, there was no further argument from that side of the table on this topic. These are scenarios that you can avoid by reviewing your case in depth and preparing for any next steps.

Lastly, your reputation can be tarnished forever if you are not on top of your case file. If you have ever gone to court and watched someone fumble through papers when the judge asks them to recite a date or they respond to the judge's question about their case with "I'm not sure," then you have already seen glimpses into that attorney's reputation for unpreparedness. The same goes for an attorney who claims that they did not receive a piece of evidence, but then opposing counsel provides the judge with a signed copy of the discovery form for the exact piece of evidence that the attorney just claimed that they never received. Instances like this do not only waste the court's time, but they leave a lasting impression that this attorney cannot be trusted in the future. How can a court ensure that what this attorney claims in the future is valid if their confident statement was so easily contradicted? As the saying goes, it takes a long time to build trust, but only a moment to lose it. Keep your reputation solid and in good standing with the court by immersing yourself in your case file before you step into any courtroom.

If you take your cases and your reputation seriously, put eyes on every document and every piece of evidence related to your case, so that you will become the case master in court and can avoid being taken by surprise.