

The After-Hours Intake Playbook for Personal Injury Firms

Stop losing the 9pm and the Saturday lead to the firm that picks up

A guy gets rear-ended at 11pm. He is sore, scared, and on his phone in the ER waiting room searching "personal injury lawyer near me." He fills out three forms and calls two firms. Whoever responds first gets the conversation. Whoever responds Monday at 9am gets nothing, because by Monday he already signed with someone else.

That is the whole game. The injury already happened. The intent is already there. The only question is who responds while the lead is still warm. Most of the time the firm that wins is not the best firm. It is the one that answered.

This playbook is the exact process for capturing those off-hours leads instead of donating them to the firm down the street. You can run it yourself. Most of it is discipline, not magic.

PLAYBOOK

Why after-hours is where the money leaks

Injured people do not call between 9 and 5. They are at work, at the doctor, on the phone with the insurance adjuster, or too rattled to think straight. The quiet moment when they finally sit down to find a lawyer is usually at night or on the weekend. That is exactly when the office is dark.

Here is what the data says about what happens when the lead arrives and nobody is there.

More than one in three calls to law firms already go unanswered during open hours. A 2026 national audit by LegalNavigator.ai and Law Leaders placed 1,200 calls to small and mid-sized U.S. firms during posted business hours and found 34.8% went completely unanswered. That is the daytime number. After 5pm, on weekends, and on holidays, a firm with no coverage misses close to all of them.

Voicemail does not save you. 80% of callers who hit voicemail hang up without leaving a message (same audit). They do not wait for a callback. They dial the next firm on the list. A voicemail box is not an intake system. It is a place leads go to die.

78% of legal clients hire the first lawyer or firm that answers (same audit). Not the best reviewed. Not the cheapest. The first one to have a real conversation. Speed is the product.

Five minutes is the line. The 2007 MIT Sloan study by Dr. James Oldroyd (with InsideSales) analyzed over 15,000 leads and 100,000 dials. Contacting a lead within 5 minutes versus 30 minutes made the firm 100x more likely to reach the person and 21x more likely to qualify them. Thirty minutes, and the odds fall off a cliff. A lead that comes in at 9pm and gets a callback at 9am the next day is not a 13-hour-old lead. It is a dead one.

Most firms are nowhere near five minutes. Harvard Business Review's research put the average web-form response time at 42 hours. Forty-two hours. By then the injured person has talked to three other firms and signed with one of them.

Do the math on your own intake. If you run paid ads, lead-gen forms, or even just referrals, a real chunk of that spend arrives when the office is closed. Every one of those that goes to voicemail is money you already paid for, handed to a competitor for free.

The fix is not "work nights." The fix is a process that responds the moment a lead lands, any hour, every channel.

The Playbook: how to cover after-hours

The goal off-hours is not to sign the case at midnight. It is to be the first real human-sounding response, qualify the lead enough to know it is worth a lawyer's time, and lock a booked callback so the lead has a reason not to keep shopping. Sign the case in the morning. Win the lead tonight.

Rule 1: respond inside five minutes, on the channel they used

If they called, call or text back. If they filled a form, email and text. If they texted, text back. Match the channel they chose. The clock starts the second the lead lands, not when someone gets to it.

Off-hours, that means the first touch has to be automatic or close to it. A human checking a shared inbox at 7am does not beat a competitor's auto-response at 9:04pm.

Rule 2: the first message buys time and books the next step

You are not closing. You are doing three things, in order:

1. Acknowledge fast and human. They are stressed. Sound like a person, not a ticket.
2. Ask the two or three questions that tell you if this is a real case.
3. Book a specific callback time so they stop calling other firms.

That is it. Acknowledge, qualify light, book.

Rule 3: qualify on injury, fault, and intent

You do not need the whole story at 11pm. You need enough to know whether to put a lawyer on it tomorrow. Three things:

- **Injury.** Were they hurt? Did they see a doctor or go to the ER? No injury, no case.
- **Fault.** What happened, and was someone else at fault? A rear-end is different from "I rear-ended someone."
- **Intent and timing.** When did it happen, and have they already signed with another firm? A wreck from 8 months ago or one already represented is a different conversation.

If those three line up, book the callback and flag it for the morning. If they do not, you still respond kindly, but you do not burn a 9am attorney slot on it.

Rule 4: book a real time, not "we'll call you"

"Someone will reach out" is what every firm says. It is why everyone keeps shopping. Offer two concrete windows on the firm's actual calendar and let them pick. A booked 9:15am slot is a commitment. It gives them a reason to stop dialing.

Rule 5: write the summary so the morning team is not starting cold

Whoever handles the 9am callback should open the file and see: what happened, when, the injury, whether there is a doctor, fault, and any deadline pressure. The off-hours touch should hand the morning a warm, qualified, scheduled lead, not a name and a number.

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Example scripts per channel

Use these as starting points. Get them approved by the firm before anything goes live, and keep them sounding like a person.

Voice (AI or live, returning a missed call)

"Hi, this is the after-hours intake line for [Firm]. I saw you just reached out about an accident. I'm sorry you're dealing with this. I can take a few quick details now and get you on the calendar with an attorney first thing in the morning. Is now an okay time to talk for a couple of minutes?"

Then, conversationally:

"Got it. Were you hurt in the accident, and have you seen a doctor yet?"

"And what happened, was someone else at fault?"

"When did this happen?"

Close:

"Thanks, that's really helpful. An attorney can call you tomorrow at 9:15 or 10:30. Which works better? I'll lock that in and they'll have your details in front of them when they call."

If the law requires it, the AI says up front that it is an automated assistant. In California it has to.

Text / iMessage (form fill or missed call at night)

First touch, within minutes:

Hi [Name], this is [Firm]'s intake line. Saw your message about the accident, sorry you're going through this. Quick question so we can help fast: were you injured, and have you seen a doctor yet?

After they reply:

Thanks. What happened, and was someone else at fault?

Book:

Got it. An attorney can call you tomorrow at 9:15am or 10:30am. Which is better? I'll put you on the calendar so they're ready when they call.

Short lines. One question at a time. Read like a human texting back, not a form letter.

Email (after-hours form submission)

Subject: Re: your message to [Firm]

Hi [Name],

Thanks for reaching out tonight. Sorry you're dealing with an accident, that's a lot to handle.

So an attorney can help quickly, a few quick questions: Were you injured, and have you seen a doctor? What happened, and was anyone else at fault? When did it happen?

I can also get you a call with an attorney first thing tomorrow. Two open times: 9:15am or 10:30am. Reply with whichever works and I'll lock it in.

*Talk soon,
[Firm] intake*

No subject-line dump in the body. No "Company: / Location: / Service:" preamble. It reads like a person wrote it because a person should be able to.

Common mistakes and the guardrails that prevent them

Relying on voicemail. Already covered, worth repeating: 80% hang up. If your after-hours plan is a recorded greeting, you do not have an after-hours plan. You have a way to learn, later, who you lost.

Slow Monday callbacks. A lead from Friday night called back Monday is gone. The 42-hour average is the trap. Speed has to be built into the system, not into someone's good intentions.

Robotic scripts. Injured people can smell a script. If the first message sounds like a form or a phone tree, they tune out and dial the next firm. Write it the way a sharp human intake person would actually talk. Warm, short, one question at a time.

Talking over the caller. On voice, the worst thing an agent can do is interrupt or step on the caller while they describe what happened. Let them finish. People who just got hurt need to feel heard before they will give you anything. An agent that interrupts kills trust in the first ten seconds.

Calling at the wrong hour. This is where firms get themselves in trouble. Callbacks and outbound have to stay inside legal calling windows: 8am to 9pm in the lead's local time zone, per TCPA. A lead comes in at 11:30pm, you do not call them back at 11:35pm. The automated first response can acknowledge and book by text or email, and the live or AI call happens inside the window. Calling at 2am is not hustle. It is a violation.

Ignoring DNC and opt-out. Scrub against do-not-call lists before any outbound. If someone says stop, the sequence ends immediately. One word, "stop," and they are out. No exceptions. This protects the firm, not just the lead.

No script approval. The firm's name is on every word. Nothing goes live until the firm has read and approved the scripts. The intake process speaks for the lawyers; the lawyers sign off on what it says.

No call summary. If the morning team opens the file and sees only a phone number, the off-hours touch was wasted. Every conversation gets written back: what happened, injury, doctor, fault, timing, and the booked callback. The handoff is the point.

PLAYBOOK

The honest close

This is the exact process we run at BookedBack. Every rule, every script, the same guardrails.

We just gave it to you. Take it and run it yourself. A lot of firms can, with a disciplined intake person and a tight system. If that is you, go win your 9pm leads.

If you would rather have it run for you, that is what BookedBack does. We work your firm's own leads across AI voice call, email, and iMessage, qualify them on injury, fault, and intent, and book the callback on your Google Calendar, including the nights and weekends when your office is closed. We stay inside TCPA calling windows, scrub DNC, end the sequence the moment someone opts out, run only scripts you approve, and write a summary back to you after every conversation.

It is performance based. Your first booked appointment is free. After that you pay only for booked appointments that actually show up, somewhere between \$50 and \$300 each depending on your setup. No retainer, nothing upfront, a 100-lead pilot, and you can cancel by text. We book the qualified, scheduled leads. You sign the cases.

We give this playbook away because we only want to work with firms that genuinely need the help. If you read this and you have got it handled, great. If you read this and realized how many 9pm and Saturday leads are slipping through, that is who we are for.

See if it fits your firm: bookedback.ai/contact

Want BookedBack to run this for you?

We run this exact process across AI voice, email, and iMessage on your own lead list. Your first booked appointment is free. After that you pay only when an appointment shows up, \$50 to \$300 each depending on volume. No software fee, no setup fee, cancel by text.

support@bookedback.ai | (408) 303-4093 | bookedback.ai/contact