

HOW TO FIND A GOOD ATTORNEY

. . . for YOU, of course. It has to be a fit all around.

Word of Mouth

Ask around for someone who has had a good experience with an attorney in a similar situation as yours. This may come from a friend, a relative, or the owner of the local Postal Annex. Focus on a "Similar situation." An attorney might have done a superb job helping your friend get divorced. If you are also interested in joining the singles crowd again, this might be your man. But a good divorce result doesn't mean that same attorney will know how to defend an eviction or squeeze the local car dealer to get you a refund on a lemon.

So when someone refers you to an attorney, look up his listing in the yellow pages. What type(s) of law does he claim to do? Or call and ask what type of matters he handles. Ask the receptionist who answers the office phone. Law consists of a lot of specialty areas; a good attorney has his hands full doing even just one of them. The lawyer who rattles off that he takes on personal injury cases, contract disputes, does a little collection work, and draws wills and leases as well is most likely not you. *Even if your problem is in one of those areas!*

Referral Attorneys

If you can't scratch up a name from your circle, next stop is your local Bar Association. In a larger city, there may be a half-dozen. If you are more rural, ask information for the nearest one.

Call and ask for a referral to an attorney in the type of law you need. If you don't know the area of law, just ask the individual you are talking to at Bar. The Bar will give you 1-3 names. Before you go too far with any, go through step number 1 above.

These referral attorneys will usually give you ½ to 1 hour of free consultation. In some cases, they will charge you a nominal fee - \$15 or \$20. Depending on what your situation is, many will do the consultation on the phone.

If you strike out online, next stop is the Internet. Two sites I am with, because I belong to both organizations are www.legalmatch.net and www.naca.net LegalMatch has a wide range of attorneys covering every conceivable aspect of law, and who have enough confidence in their abilities to pay a hefty sum to be on the site. At NACA (National Association of Consumer Attorneys) you will find attorneys whose practice is limited to representing individuals who are generally being victimized by by one shyster or another. Many of my clients who are being harassed from overzealous collectors or are being sued by debt collection companies come from these sites.

Expertise

You can gauge this from your conversation with the attorney. Does he know the answers to your questions, or will he look them up and get back to you? You want to feel that for the price you are going to pay that the attorney knows what he is doing. You want a sense that he knows the law and how to apply it. Without having to look it up.

What Will it Cost?

Expect that after your talk, the attorney will give you a ballpark figure of how much you are going to contribute to his life style. If whatever you have is more than just a one-shot affair, such as drawing up a simple trust document, expect to get this in writing. If litigation is on the horizon, you should get a range of fees for four situations: 1) if the matter can be settled before getting into a lawsuit (on either side), 2) if the matter gets settled shortly after the lawsuit begins, 3) if it gets settled far down the line, and 4) if your attorney has to go through a whole trial.

Depending on the type of case, the attorney may take it on a **contingency**. That means doesn't get paid unless he wins.

Attorneys normally bargain to collect from 33-40% of whatever they win. Or the attorney may offer you a hybrid arrangement. He might charge you half his hourly rate, and take only 15-20% of a contingency if he wins for you.

In any event, be sure you have something in writing before you commit.

What kind of service?

Ask the attorney how he is going to keep you up to date on what is going on. I have a rule that everything that comes into the office or that I send out, the client gets a copy. Sometimes I send a short e-mail, that I generally don't charge for.

Are you going to be charged for copies and faxes, and how much. How about minimums. Most attorneys will charge a minimum of 2 tenths of an hour for each phone call where they connect with someone. Even if the call only lasts 30 seconds. Explore these items.

Does it feel right?

Even if everything else seems OK, are you comfortable with the attorney. Do you get the sense that he/she is interested in you and your case more than in your money? Consider how long you will be in the relationship with him/her. If you aren't sure, don't commit right away. You may want to check around some more. Consider the relationship like a short-term marriage. You want your attorney "partner" to be competent, interested in you and your case, and fun to work with – at a reasonable rate.

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