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ATTORNEYS AT LAW



## LEGAL BRIEFS

### Issues to Consider When Choosing an Attorney

Some of you deal with attorneys day-in and day-out, while some have been fortunate and have not regularly needed the advice of legal counsel. The likelihood is good, however, that there will come a day that you too will need to seek the advice of a lawyer. It may be to deal with a crisis, to help you organize a new business entity or simply because you have finally decided to get your estate planning affairs completed. Whatever the reason, you will want to feel comfortable and confident in selecting an attorney.

Begin your search for an attorney with the obvious. If you or your family members, friends, neighbors or colleagues have used and liked a particular attorney, start your search with him or her. If you do not have or know any attorneys and you do not just want pick a name out of the telephone book, you might want to call the legal referral service or chamber of commerce in your county. Check if the law firm has a web site. This will provide you with information about the firm's practice areas and give you a general idea about its philosophy. Once you have found a worthy prospect, arrange for an initial interview. Normally, attorneys will give you such a consultation for free or for a nominal fee.

Regardless of how you come up with the name of your prospective attorney, there are several attributes you will want to consider in choosing an attorney. These include maintenance of high ethical standards, appearance and professionalism, accessibility, reasonableness of fees, membership in professional associations, good standing with the bar association, and infrequent use of "legalese", that language that only attorneys understand.

During your initial interview, be prepared to ask questions so as to find out as much as you can about the attorney and the law firm. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Have you (the attorney) handled cases similar to mine?
2. Can I meet the other attorneys or staff who will work on my case?

3. How may I expect my case to progress?
4. What is an estimated time for the completion of my case?
5. Explain your billing procedures, including how out-of-pocket costs are billed?

Don't be surprised if the attorney asks you questions about yourself and the case. A good attorney will want to obtain as much information as possible from you so that he or she can appropriately handle your case. Following your initial interview, you should have a clear understanding of the legal principles involved in your case, the scope of your relationship with the attorney and of how and when you will be billed for services.

Searching for an attorney should not be a dreaded experience and, if you keep an open mind and maintain a plan of action, it can actually evolve into a long-term relationship, both personal and professional. But like any relationship, you must first ensure that your attorney is someone you can trust, someone with whom you can openly communicate and someone with whom you can do business.