

HOW TO SELECT A LAWYER

Selecting a lawyer is very much like selecting a doctor. The time to do it is when you don't need one. Most of us, unfortunately, don't even begin to think of it until an emergency arises.

Having a family lawyer you know, trust, and can call on in emergencies, can provide a great deal of peace of mind, even to those who prefer to handle some matters on their own, without the advice of an attorney. Some businesses, wealthy persons, and a few people who seem to stay in hot water all the time, may need to keep an attorney on retainer, but most people find it better to pay an attorney on an hourly or case-by-case basis.

For most matters, an attorney in general practice, who handles matters such as real estate, marital problems, commercial matters, minor criminal offenses, wills, and personal injury or property claims, is sufficient. The general practitioner is very capable of keeping your legal affairs in order and can refer you to a specialist whom he knows and trusts, when necessary.

For more complex matters, such as serious criminal offenses, workers' compensation cases, bankruptcies, etc., the services of an attorney who specializes in that particular area may be a wise choice. Your best recommendations for a specialty lawyer will come from a family lawyer. If you don't have a family lawyer, your best recommendations for a family or specialty lawyer will come from satisfied clients. Word of mouth is the very best place to start your search.

Even if you are new in a particular area, business associates, neighbors, accountants, and sometimes bank personnel, will make a recommendation. Be sure, however, that the recommendation is based on a prior business relationship with the lawyer and not on a personal one.

If you can't find a lawyer by recommendation, contact your local bar association, which will be listed in the white pages of your telephone directory under the name of the county in which you live, i.e. Brevard County Bar Association. Ask to speak with someone in their lawyer referral service. Some referral services screen lawyers before listing them, but others do not. Most, however, do have lawyers listed in their records according to their areas of expertise. In many cases, you may have an initial consultation with an attorney for a very small set fee, but be sure to ask how you will be charged at the time you set the appointment.

Some communities have legal services directories, listing attorneys, their specialties, training, and sometimes even their fees. Ask the local bar association if such a directory exists in your area and how to obtain one.

If you have exhausted all other avenues in your search, you may find a lawyer through advertisements. While many attorneys still don't advertise, it is a useful way of generating new business and advising the public of the areas in which a lawyer practices.

Regardless of the method you have used to obtain names of prospective lawyers, you may feel it necessary to interview them

before making a final decision. You may be charged as much as \$25.00 for fifteen minutes of the lawyer's time, but you'll still be way ahead in the game if it results in the selection of a lawyer with whom you can develop an effective, long time relationship. Remember that the purpose of your visit is to interview the lawyer. Don't be afraid to ask questions about his practice, his staff, and especially his experience in handling matters such as yours. If you are looking for a family lawyer, it would be a good idea to take your spouse and possibly a grown child along, as they will probably deal with the lawyer as much as you will.

Many people ask whether a small firm or a large firm is best. There are good lawyers in firms of all sizes and there are advantages and disadvantages in both small and large firms. Before choosing a sole practitioner, you should, however, inquire into who handles matters when he is ill or on vacation.

Sometimes finding a lawyer who is right for you may be

just a matter of luck, but by following the recommendations herein, you will certainly increase your chances of the right match.