

How to Select a Good Lawyer

- Look at the websites and biographies for the lawyers and their law firms. Do they appear to have expertise in the area of law that you need? Is the information helpful?
- Look for a list of representative clients. Does the lawyer represent other clients with issues similar to yours?
- Ask other people if they heard of the attorney.
- Contact your state bar association or go to its website to learn if the lawyer is in good standing.
- Check out the yellow pages of your telephone directory. Does the lawyer advertise? If so, is the ad compelling? Helpful? Tasteful?
- Identify prospective lawyers and learn what you can about their law practice. Initially screen them and narrow down your list to three or four prospective candidates.

Before You Meet with a Lawyer

- Ask for references. Talk with people who could comment on the lawyer's skills and trustworthiness.
- Does the lawyer represent anyone who could be a conflict of interest?
- Ask about fees and billing. Is the initial consultation free? Do you pay on an hourly basis or on a retainer for the case?
- Are you able to easily schedule an appointment with the lawyer? If the lawyer can't see you to talk about new business, it may be even harder to get his or her attention to talk about your case once it's been underway for a while.

Meeting with a Lawyer

- Treat your first meeting as a business consultation. Dress appropriately; be prompt and courteous. Have questions and documents ready.
- While you may still change your mind, be prepared to proceed by bringing a checkbook and credit card to pay a retainer to the lawyer.
- During your first meeting, share all relevant information. Remember, even if you don't hire the lawyer, everything you relate is subject to attorney-client privilege. Being honest is in your best interest. Let the attorney decide what is or is not in your favor.
- The lawyer may offer you alternatives about a course of action. Discuss the possible consequences of each option. The lawyer may be willing to advise you on how to proceed.
- If the lawyer is willing to take your case, ask about charges for services. You may receive a contract called a *retainer agreement* or a *legal services agreement*, which the lawyer should explain to you. Read and understand the document before you sign it. At that time or before services are rendered, you may also be asked to pay a retainer or deposit.
- As you visit with each lawyer, trust your judgment. Ask, "Do I like this person? Does he or she seem willing to take the time to listen to what's going on and what I want to accomplish? To explain my options?"
- Visit several lawyers before making a decision. If the lawyer seems offended that you would do this, he or she may not be confident enough to serve you well. *Note:* Do not be offended if a lawyer asks you to pay a consultation fee even for the first meeting.

Source: *The Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory*, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc.