

**How to Find the
Right Lawyer**
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Choosing a lawyer to help with advice or representation on legal or business matters involves personal, professional, ethical and financial considerations. No lawyer can be “just right” for every legal matter. Furthermore, once a particular lawyer or law firm is selected, it grows rapidly difficult to switch horses in the middle of the stream. Consequently, the selection of an attorney to help with a business or personal problem deserves a good deal of attention.

First, plan to personally meet any lawyer you are thinking of hiring. By meeting the lawyer in his or her (and it is increasingly her) offices, you will be able to get a sense of whether you are dealing with someone who is organized and on top of his practice or likely to lose your messages amidst piles of paper. You must also decide if you think you like this person and whether you will be able to trust him or her.

Information about an attorney’s professional standing can be found in law lists. Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory (www.martindale.com or www.lawyers.com) is the most common list. In it you can find an attorney’s professional “pedigree” and in many cases how he has been rated by his peers. And don’t forget to ask if the lawyer has experience with your kind of case or access to other attorneys with the necessary expertise.

Be aware that in any dispute an attorney must avoid conflicts of interest. The attorney will probably ask the identity of any other parties to a dispute. You do not want to waste time speaking to an attorney who will prove unable to handle your case because he or another member of his firm represents another party to the dispute.

Always ask about fee arrangements in your first meeting. Insist on itemized billing with a clear indication of who did what for how long and at what rate and for what charge. Ask if there will be any charge for discussing billing questions with the lawyer. Request a written fee agreement or engagement letter.

It is also a good idea to ask if your lawyer carries malpractice insurance. Do not assume all lawyers carry it. They don’t.

Finally it is a good idea to find out if your lawyer has a policy concerning returning client phone calls. Nothing is more maddening then having to repeatedly call for information. Once you choose a lawyer remember that you are paying for advice, so it is usually a good idea to follow it.