

5 THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN SELECTING AN ATTORNEY

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Selecting and hiring an attorney is one of the most important things that you will ever do in life. Hiring the right attorney can help you navigate through some tough legal problems that may affect you the rest of your life. There is no reason to take shortcuts. Here are some tips that can help you select the right attorney for you and your legal matter.

1. Ask for referral from a trusted source. Be sure to get more than one attorney's name. A minimum of three (3) will help ensure the best attorney is selected.

Once, you have the names then set up the consultations. Now is not the time to sign up with the very first attorney that you speak with. Or worse, simply call around and choose the lowest priced attorney. Good attorneys, like most everything else in life, will cost more.

2. Once you arrive for your consultation be sure to observe and talk to the staff. Are they professional, knowledgeable, and friendly? These are the people that you will be dealing with on a regular basis in the foreseeable future. Remember the old saying that "birds of a feather flock together." Winners will work for winners. A good attorney will not employ a hostile or incompetent person for very long.

Next get a sense of the general surroundings. Are the offices or conference rooms clean and organized? Or are they unclean and disorganized? The condition of the office is usually a reflection of the attorney's attention to detail which is extremely important in the legal field.

3. Write out a list of questions to provide to the potential attorney. This does two (2) things. First, it allows the consultation to move along much quicker and get more things accomplished when you are prepared. The attorney is able to determine very quickly what issues are most important to you. Second, it prevents the "oops" factor when you realize that an important question was not answered or is still unclear.

4. Be realistic about what is going to occur at the initial consultation. The initial consultation is intended for you and the attorney to get know each other. This meeting will allow you to tell the attorney about your legal problem and your concerns.

Strategy or in-depth legal issues will probably not be discussed at this first meeting. Rather, you can get an idea about how the attorney may approach your legal issue. Is your legal problem very complicated? If it is, then you may need to hire an attorney who specializes in the legal field in which you need help.

It also gives you the opportunity to learn about the attorney's fees, other costs like court fees, service of process fees, and other fees associated with a legal case. Be sure to discuss a potential payment plan if you wish to hire the attorney but are financially unable at the first meeting. Most attorneys will allow you to set up a payment plan.

5. After you select an attorney be sure that the retainer agreement is in writing. Some representations must be in writing while others are not required to be in writing. However, it is a very good idea to have everything necessary in writing. It keeps everyone, client and attorney, on the same page.

The retainer agreement should include:

the attorney fees and payment terms if a payment plan was created

any additional costs and how the costs are to be paid

what specific legal services are included and which legal services are not covered

what is expected of both the attorney and the client