



## Choosing a Lawyer by Jodi Wyman

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There may come a time in your life when you will require a lawyer for a matter, whether it be a real estate transaction, preparing a will, setting up a business, or even a more serious litigation matter.

It can be difficult to choose a lawyer with whom you feel comfortable. Simply comparison-shopping for the best rate will not get you the best result. Depending upon the complexity of the matter, you will likely want to do more research.

One of the best ways to find a lawyer is to speak with friends, relatives and co-workers. Find out with whom they have worked. Ask about their lawyer's style and see if it will fit with what you want. Also ask other professionals, such as your accountant or financial planner, as they often work with lawyers in their professional capacity.

Ensure that the lawyer to whom you are referred practices in the area with which you are concerned, especially if it is a litigation matter. If you know a lawyer who does not practice in

the area you require, ask your lawyer for a referral.

The Law Society of Manitoba offers a Law Phone-In and Lawyer Referral Program which can match a lawyer to a client with particular needs. You can also contact Law Societies in other provinces. Generally for litigation, you will require a lawyer in the same city as the court case.

If you have a unique area of law with which you require assistance, contact the Manitoba Bar Association. It has records of a number of lawyers as members of specialized subsections.

If you have a family law case, or a potentially lengthy litigation matter, you will want to meet the lawyer before retaining them. Although you can interview any number of lawyers before hiring one, be prepared to pay for their time to meet with you. Some law firms do offer a short free consultation, but generally you will have to pay for the meeting. Not only can a face-to-face meeting help you assess whether the lawyer's style will be a good fit with you, but as well you can

get valuable advice and guidance even with a first consultation. As a general rule, at an initial meeting with a lawyer, you should do most of the talking. The lawyer needs a thorough picture of your circumstances before giving you advice.

You may also try researching through the internet. In particular, law firm websites allow you to review biographical and professional information for the lawyer, as well as their areas of expertise. Many law firm websites also have legal information or articles that may assist you in moving in the proper direction.

Depending upon your income you may want to contact a Legal Aid office to see whether you qualify for assistance with your legal fees.

Lastly, it is a myth that if you have a serious and complex legal matter you must find a lawyer in a larger centre, such as Winnipeg. Talk to a local lawyer first. You will most likely find someone completely capable of assisting you, and it can save you money.