



## Interviewing your Lawyer By Jodi Wyman

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When you find yourself in need of a lawyer, it can be difficult to choose the right person.

One of the best ways to get the name of a good lawyer is to speak with friends, relatives and co-workers. Find out whom they have worked with. Also ask other professionals such as your accountant or financial planner, as they often work with lawyers.

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 which may help you to get a basic understanding of your issue.

When you first meet with the lawyer, you want to be sure he or she is the best choice for you but it is sometimes hard to know what to ask.

Always ensure that the lawyer practices in the area with which you are concerned, especially if

it is a litigation matter. Ask them how long they have been practicing law and how much experience they have in the area. Is your area of law only a small part of their practice?

Ask specific questions about your case, such as the best and worst case scenarios and the likely outcomes. See if the lawyer can give you an estimate as to how long the case could take to complete, and what possible complications could arise.

Always, always, ask about legal fees at the initial meeting with a lawyer. Not only should you ask about how you will be charged, but also request a retainer letter. Ask about how often you will be billed, and if your statement of account will be based strictly on time and the hourly rate or also on the outcome of the case. Although most clients ask for an estimate as to the total cost of the case, understand that in litigation cases it is very hard to give an estimate, given all the variables.

It is a good idea to find out what you can expect in terms of the

work on your case. Ask if other people such as paralegals or junior lawyers will be assisting your lawyer, and if it is alright if you call them. Find out if copies of all correspondence will be sent to you automatically or only on request. Some clients prefer to be updated frequently, and some want to be called only when absolutely necessary. Some clients prefer email to phone calls, or to receive correspondence by fax. These types of office procedures can be discussed at the first meeting.

It is a good idea to ask about the lawyer's schedule. Does he or she work out of town for one or two days during the week? When are they normally in Court? Is there a better day or time of the day to reach them by phone? Will they return your calls the same day?

If you are not satisfied with the answers to your questions at the first meeting, or you do not feel comfortable with the lawyer, never be afraid to meet with someone else. The lawyer and

the client have to be able to work as a team, sometimes for years. Although you can interview a number of lawyers before hiring one, be prepared to pay for their time to meet with you.