

CHOOSING A LAWYER FOR YOU

Michael H. Wald, Wald & Associates

You've searched for a lawyer, and have some names.

What do you do now to choose one?

You should choose a lawyer with whom you feel comfortable. One with affordable fees.

And one who appears sincerely interested in your problem.

You want to feel that your lawyer will do his or her best, with a mind to cost, to solve your problem. That's about it.

You don't want a cold, degreed professional to handle your case on an assembly line basis. You are purchasing the services of a degreed professional, yes, but don't you want to be able to relate to him or her and vice-versa? He or she needs to handle your case in an analytical way, but he or she needs to understand you as a human -- how far you feel you want to go with a particular issue, and how you will stand up in court, for example.

Avoid the lawyer who:

1. won't return your phone calls after several days,

2. advertises to handle cases at fixed rates – generally, these lawyers are good at the simple, quickly-processed cases only, like traffic tickets. If you have such a problem, one of these lawyers may be okay. Usually at these attorneys' offices you won't ever see an attorney. A secretary will get the information needed from you. They can do it this way because the cases are so simple that an attorney's judgment is not really needed.

3. Avoid a lawyer who has been disbarred in Texas or another state -- the Texas Bar Association can tell you, but it takes a call to Austin.

4. A lawyer who offers a "free consultation" is, in many cases, a lawyer who runs potential clients through his or her office at a frantic rate, looking only for those cases that he or she can economically take on a contingent fee basis -- where the lawyer gets paid a percentage of the settlement. This lawyer sifts through a huge population of cases and picks out only those cases that look most promising -- those the lawyer can settle without a great investment of his time, or those with very large, clear liability cases with insurance coverage for the defendant. Don't waste time with such a lawyer, unless you think you have one of these cases. Lawyers, who make a living selling their time, don't give away very much of it for "free."

Look for a lawyer who will keep you up to date, and explains things in normal terms -- if your lawyer can't explain your case to you, how is he or she going to explain it to a jury?

One way to help you sort out the chaff from the wheat is to find out what law school the lawyer in question attended. Though not every Harvard Law School graduate is better than every graduate of a smaller law school, it is safe to say that some law schools are better than others.

In other words, if you see any of these degrees on the wall, it's a pretty safe bet at least that the lawyer was able to meet the standards of one of the best law schools: Berkeley, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Georgetown, Harvard, Michigan, New York University, Northwestern, Penn, Stanford, Yale, and other distinguished law schools.

These schools tend to teach law on a national, not localized basis, so they produce more scholars that can see the "big picture" -- lesser schools teach on more of a technical basis, and end up producing more technicians, rather than craftsmen.

About big firm vs. small firm -- the larger firms have on-staff professionals to handle every legal problem. They charge more money for every problem partly because they must keep these folks on staff even when problems in their particular specialized field aren't being handled. They need more support people than small firms, and can offer a wider array of services, if you need them. They can also be less personal than small firms.

Overall, look for an affordable, genuinely concerned lawyer to whom you can relate, and who can relate to you and your problem.

You won't be bound to your lawyer for life, but it can make a big difference whom you choose to represent you.

© Copyright 2000 Michael Wald