

Four steps to choosing an attorney

Gina M. Barry, Esq.



Choosing an attorney to represent you in any legal matter can be an especially daunting task.

Should you rely on advertising you might have seen in the local media or is there a better way to ensure that the attorney you choose is right for you and your particular legal matter? To make the best choice, many factors should be considered.

Do your homework

Initially, you will want to conduct some research. Here, the internet and local bar associations can be particularly useful resources. You should seek an attorney who specializes in the area of law that surrounds your particular legal matter. If you are looking to establish an estate plan, you should choose an estate planning specialist. If you are divorcing your spouse, you should choose a family law specialist. Often times, experts in their field are asked to publish articles in various publications, to speak at various forums or to teach at educational institutions or seminars. Look for these accomplishments on the attorney's professional resume, in addition to

reviewing the attorney's basic academic credentials.

Once you have narrowed the field of candidates to attorneys specializing in that particular area of law, you should inquire whether the attorney has handled cases with legal issues similar to yours. Experience is a great teacher, and an attorney who has handled numerous cases with similar issues will be better able to address your legal issues efficiently and effectively.

Book a face-to-face

When meeting with an attorney that you may potentially hire, you should pay attention to several details. When discussing the issues involved in your case, you should be able to understand the concepts that are being discussed, even if they are extremely sophisticated. Ask yourself whether the attorney was able to answer your questions and explain your legal options, including the pros and cons of each option, in a way that was both thorough and easy to understand. During this meeting, you should also pay attention to whether the attorney's demeanor toward you and others is professional and courteous.

While visiting the attorney's office, you should also take note of the office's resources, both human and technological. The office should be

adequately staffed with helpful, friendly employees who ensure that your needs are met from the moment you enter the office and throughout your working relationship. You should also inquire as to the firm's technological abilities from the standpoint of your particular legal matter. For example, you might find it important that the attorney handling your real estate closing has the ability to send and receive wire transfers.

Are you two a good fit?

Even the most skilled attorney may not be a good match for you personally. When meeting with the attorney, you should find that the attorney demonstrates a genuine interest in helping you address your legal issues. The attorney should be able to provide a timeline for resolution of the matter and set forth a clear plan of action for reaching that resolution. If your approach does not mesh well with the approach of the attorney, you should continue looking until you find an attorney who can work with you at a pace and level that is comfortable for you.

You should also address the attorney's response time for any given legal matter. The most common complaint regarding

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attorneys is that they do not return telephone calls in a timely manner. If you expect a return call from your attorney within a certain number of hours, you should address that with the attorney at the outset. If the attorney is able to accommodate your needs, you should enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship whereas an attorney who is not responsive enough for your needs will certainly disappoint you.

Don't skip the money talk

Once you have found the right attorney, be sure to discuss the attorney's fees for the services to be provided. Legal bills can be expensive, and you should be certain that you are willing to pay what the attorney will charge to achieve your desired outcome. By doing so, you and the attorney will have a clear understanding from the beginning, and you will avoid squabbles over invoices generated in the future.

While there is no science to choosing the right attorney, you should always consider the basic factors discussed herein. Pay attention to these factors when seeking out and interviewing your potential attorney and eliminate the guesswork. Your satisfaction with the legal process depends on it.

Gina M. Barry is a Partner in the regional law firm of Bacon Wilson, P.C., Attorneys at Law. She is a member of the National Association of Elder Law Attorneys, the Estate Planning Council, and the Western Massachusetts Elder Care Professionals Association. She concentrates her practice in the areas of estate and asset protection planning, probate administration and litigation, guardianships, conservatorships and residential real estate. She may be reached at 413 - 781-0560 or gbarry@baconwilson.com.