

How to Find an Attorney – Regardless of Your Budget

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I am sometimes called into situations where clients have hired other attorneys and aren't happy with their services (or bills). I mean, I've heard some loud complaints. Another scenario I've encountered: the client comes to me with an employment-related agreement that lacks basic terms (hopelessly vague) or isn't enforceable. So it becomes obvious to me that either 1) the client found something on the internet and copied it, or 2) prior counsel didn't know what they were doing or did not do it carefully. What to do?

If you're an individual reading this and you don't have money for a regular attorney's rate, you may apply to various state or local agencies for free or reduced-cost help with some types of matters. You may also file certain litigations on your own behalf (although not all) and ask that the Court appoint you free counsel – yes, even in a civil case. Call your state's bar association, as well; they may have other suggestions, such as working with supervised students at a law school.

If you are looking for counsel on a business matter, then as Mama said, SHOP AROUND. Here's how:

- Look for a specialist in the particular area(s) of law involved. Don't call your neighbor because he's the only attorney you know. Don't rely on your best friend (that can get messy) or even their recommendations without doing your own research.
- To find a specialist, you may turn to the web, but don't defer to the attorneys at the top of the page (they paid Google for the privilege). You could also look in local recent publications for "Best Lawyers" lists, but only those where attorneys are peer-selected. How long have they been practicing in that area? Do they claim so many specialties that it's a bit suspect?
- After locating some attorneys who list the area as a specialty, contact several attorneys. Describe your situation, ask how often they handle this type of matter and for how many years. Just like a surgeon, you're looking for someone who's handled this procedure many times.
- Don't go to the firm your organization "has used forever" unless you are very comfortable with the expertise and experience of the current lawyers at the firm (and their rates; ask).
- Ask: who will handle the bulk of the work, the experienced partner or the new associate?
- Get quotes from qualified attorneys. There is a huge range of billable rates for the same work from very similar lawyers. Recently I was on a call with lawyers from a firm (who aren't as experienced). The two of them on the other end of the phone cost their client almost three times what I charged my client.

These might seem time-consuming. But these efforts could save tens of thousands of dollars.

Best regards,

Katherine