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NEED A GOOD LAWYER? WHO DO YOU CALL?

Who hasn't heard the old adage "a person who represents himself has a fool for a client"? You may not want to represent yourself for obvious reasons but the question remains as to how do you find a good lawyer? You may need to seek the services of an attorney for any number of issues related to your family, your business, your real estate, your disability, or the distribution of your estate. The person you hire for any one of these important areas must provide diligent representation. The attorney you select should act as your advocate and your counselor. Therefore it is very important to have a rapport with your attorney. You must feel comfortable that your questions will be listened to and answered, your phone calls will be returned in a reasonable amount of time and you will be advised of the status of your proceedings in a timely manner. Obviously you need to know that the attorney's background is suitable for the problem that you seek to resolve. Many attorneys specialize and others concentrate in areas of law. Some attorneys are general practitioners who offer a greater variety of services. The choice is individual in the selection of a multi-lawyer firm, a sole practitioner, or a "boutique firm" that concentrates in a particular area. Each will offer a different "personality". The client needs to ask questions to make the appropriate selection. How do you know? Ask family, friends and business associates for referrals. Someone may have had a similar problem and a good experience, or for that matter, a bad experience. A telephone consultation is not a substitute for a

face-to-face meeting with the attorney you seek to hire. There may be a consultation fee but it is worth the investment. You must decide whether or not you can work together. Attorneys are happy to provide you with information on their background. Ask if the attorney or an associate will handle your matter. Will a paralegal be used? When is the best time to speak to the attorney personally? Will you receive copies of all correspondence that comes in and goes out in relation to your file? Does the attorney litigate or attempt to negotiate disputed matters? How will you be billed and how frequently? In almost every case you should receive a written retainer agreement, which sets out how you will be charged as well as the attorney's hourly rate. Make sure that when you get your bills, you review them. You certainly don't want to be charged for work that is done on someone else's file. Mistakes happen.

Ask questions about the process so you can make reasonable choices to affect the outcome of your matter. Don't allow yourself to be patronized. "I'll take care of it" or "don't worry about it" is a Pandora's Box. Litigation is extremely expensive. Ask what other alternatives may be available such as mediation, arbitration, etc. No one wants to be handed a bill for a lawsuit that could have been avoided by a faster and cheaper avenue such as alternate dispute resolution. With more information you have greater ability to make sure you can forge a working partnership with the attorney.

Doing some homework may well prevent an unsatisfactory relationship from which it may be difficult to walk away. Follow these simple suggestions and you will avoid a misunderstanding and a great deal of frustration.