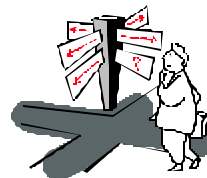


How to Hire an Attorney

I. Attorney Fees and Costs:

Don't be afraid to ask for information about the fees and costs when you call an attorney's office. These are some of the common terms that attorneys use to charge for their services:



Hourly Rates: In general, attorneys with more experience charge more per hour. However, an attorney with more experience might need less time to perform the same work. Prices in cities are usually higher than in smaller towns. While general experience counts, you should also consider how much experience an attorney has with your particular type of case.

Retainer Fees: Some attorneys require a retainer fee (money paid before the attorney begins work) to pay for the attorney's anticipated work. When your retainer money has been used to pay for the attorney's services and other costs, you might either be asked to pay an additional retainer or begin to receive monthly bills for your attorney's time and costs.

Contingent Fees: A contingent fee means that you will not pay the attorney at first (although you will probably have to pay for costs like physical exams). If you win your case, the attorney will take a portion of the settlement or judgment (usually 25%-33%). Injury, Labor & Industry, and Social Security cases are usually paid in this manner.

Flat fees: Flat fees are common for only a few types of cases, like an uncontested divorce (dissolution), or to draw up a legal document, such as a real estate contract or will.

Payment plan: Some attorneys may agree for you to pay their fees in monthly installments or by another method. If this is the only way that you could pay, ask the attorney if he or she would be agreeable to accept monthly payments.

II. What Should I Ask?

Like contracting for any other service, you should feel comfortable asking a lot of questions.

You should assure yourself that the attorney is willing to answer your questions and that you feel comfortable with the attorney. Remember that you are not obligated to hire the first attorney you speak with.

Some questions you might want to ask when you call an attorney's office:

1. Do you give a free initial consultation (to hear about my problem and tell me about your charges?)
2. How much do you charge for this kind of work?
3. What kinds of cases do you normally handle?
4. How often have you handled cases like mine?
5. Will you need to consult with other attorneys?
6. About how much time does it usually take to resolve cases like mine?
7. How will you make big decisions about my case?
8. About how much time do you usually need to return telephone calls from clients?
9. What methods do you use to inform your clients about what's happening in their cases?
10. Do you charge for work done by any of your employees, for example paralegals or legal assistants?
11. Will you give me a list of what costs you charge for, for instance long-distance telephone calls, photocopies, etc.?

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