

**How Do You Find A Qualified
Personal Injury Attorney?**

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Unfortunately, today too many people have fallen for simply locating an advertiser close to where they live or work. If you look closely at all lawyer ads, there is a Florida Bar required disclosure which says:

“The hiring of a lawyer is an important decision that should not be based solely on advertisements. Before you decide, ask us to send you free written information about our qualifications and experience.”

My experience is that no one requests such written information. For years, I was a partner in an advertising firm. I was astonished at the number of people who hired attorneys without requesting any information about the lawyers' background or experience. The common statement I heard was “I assume you're qualified or you wouldn't be advertising.” Everyday, countless people entrust their cases into the hands of attorneys about whom they have virtually no information. They certainly know nothing about how their case is going to be handled.

I've written this book so that you can ask questions, become informed, and help select the lawyer you decide is right for your case. Let's look at some things you need to consider.

Who Is Good In Your Area? Here Are Some Tips:

1. If you know a lawyer, ask for a referral. He or she will probably know someone who specializes in the type of case you have.
2. What about the yellow pages?
First, keep in mind that not everyone advertises there. In my practice, I have never had a display ad in the yellow pages. Most of my cases come from other attorneys or satisfied clients. Second, watch out for lawyers doing too many specialties. No one can do everything well. The law in personal injury, in my opinion, demands a lawyer's full time attention to stay current. Third, be careful of full page ads. Those ads are designed to attract volume. Can you be assured your case won't be lost in the mass of other cases the lawyer is handling?
3. There are referral sources that will refer you to an attorney. Understand that most lawyers have paid a fee to be listed under a specialty. Find out what screening the referral service did in order to list the attorney. If you go for an interview, ask some of the questions I've raised in this book before you decide.
4. If you meet with an attorney, see if he or she offers you the type of information provided in this book to help you become informed before you decide. What type of specific information does the lawyer provide about how each case is handled and by whom? Make sure you actually meet and spend time with the lawyer who will do the work on your case. What part of handling your file will be delegated? Who will negotiate with the insurance company? Who will try your case, if required?
5. What about the practice of having someone sent to your home to "sign you up?" It is common in large volume practices to have a non-lawyer go to the client's home for the initial visit. Do you really believe it is in your best interest not to meet with your lawyer at an initial visit? When will you meet with your lawyer? Does this mean that the lawyer has designed their practice so that he or she seldom, if ever, personally deals with clients? Is that what you want for your case? Do you want to deal only with file processors and legal assistants?
6. Be careful if you have been solicited at home by a "cold" mailing. Look carefully at the material you have been provided. Does it give you the type of information found in this book or do you feel rushed to make a decision?
7. Be careful if the lawyer insists on you seeing "their" doctor. Watch out for the stack of their doctor's business cards. As I discuss in this book, this has the potential to be used by the insurance company to kill your case at trial.
8. Will the lawyer pursue a diminished value claim for you? Many vehicles suffer a big reduction in value even though they were repaired.

9. Here are points you should look for and discuss with your attorney. Every attorney won't meet each one, but you should be careful when you learn of glaring weaknesses.

Experience... Almost without exception, the longer a lawyer has practiced a special area of the law, the more they will know. Experience is a big factor in most cases.

Can they try your case if required...Are they ready and willing to try your case? Do they have the financial means to pay the costs required to take your case to the courtroom? Has he or she achieved significant verdicts or settlements? Will he or she provide you with a list of verdicts or settlements? Insurance companies respect lawyers willing to try cases. Past results are not a guarantee of the future, but they do represent some level of experience and success.

Respect in the legal community...is the lawyer viewed with respect by other lawyers. Martindale-Hubbell provides a legal review process for lawyers, allowing them to be rated by other lawyers in the area of legal ability and ethics. Go to Martindale-Hubbell.com and see how the lawyer is rated.

Board Certification...Some lawyers pursue certification by the Bar in the area of civil trials. It demonstrates a level of knowledge & experience. It does not, however, tell you about how the lawyer will handle your file, who will work on it and what involvement the lawyer will have personally on your behalf.

Publication... has the lawyer published, particularly has he or she published anything which would help you select the best lawyer for your case?

Organizations... Is the lawyer involved professionally? Does he or she belong to trial lawyer organizations, such as Florida Justice Association, American Justice Association or the local Tampa Bay Trial Lawyer Association?

Continuing Legal Education... All lawyers are required to report to the bar certain minimum legal education courses. Does the lawyer go beyond the minimum? How many continuing education courses has he or she attended in the last year and who conducted them?

Protection of your file... How will your file materials be protected? Fires and hurricanes are a fact of life in Florida. Does the lawyer have a system to electronically scan your file materials for safe keeping in the event of an unexpected disaster? Failure to have such systems would result in everything being lost, should tragedy occur.

**Once You Have Decided On An Attorney, Make Sure You Both
Understand Your Goals
And How The Relationship Between
You And Your Attorney Will Work**

10. How will the attorney keep you informed of the activities in your case? Who will you hear from and when? What will you receive in writing and how often? And, how promptly will your phone calls be answered? **The most common complaint about lawyers is their failure to answer client calls and questions promptly.**

11. Who will actually work on your case? What responsibility does each person have? If you are hiring a lawyer because of their trial skills, make sure that person will be trying your case.

