

# How to Choose a Qualified Lawyer

**Tip #1: Choose an attorney who specializes in providing the type of services you need.** For example, if you want to create an estate plan, choose an estate planning attorney. If you want a lawyer who can help with trust and probate administration, choose a lawyer who specializes in that area. If you think your case might go to trial, choose a trial attorney (litigator). Why? Because the legal profession has gotten so specialized, other attorneys don't have the high level of knowledge, skill, judgment and experience needed to provide the services you want.

**Tip #2: Choose an attorney you trust.** Nothing is more important in a lawyer/client relationship than having a lawyer you trust.

**Tip #3: Choose an attorney who designs your estate plan himself.** You hire the lawyer because of the depth of his knowledge, skill, judgment and experience. Certainly, you want the lawyer (and not his secretary) to design your estate plan based on your circumstances and goals.

**Tip #4: Choose an attorney who works with trained legal assistants or paralegals to create and implement your estate plan.** Estate planning is often thought of as a "form practice." On occasion, lawyers ask you to fill in the blanks and then turn your estate plan over to their secretary, who processes the paperwork. This often results in a defective estate plan. Make sure the lawyer you hire uses only trained legal assistants or paralegals to help create and implement your estate plan.

**Tip #5: Choose an attorney who provides excellent service.** Anything less is not acceptable.

**Tip #6: Choose an attorney who welcomes your questions**-- and structures meetings by allowing enough time to answer questions. High-volume practices have short appointments so they can move clients quickly through the process. We don't know about you, but this is not the level of service we expect when we hire a lawyer.

**Tip #7: Choose an attorney who will return your phone calls quickly.** You should never hire a lawyer who won't respond promptly to your needs.

**Tip #8: Choose an attorney who has roots in the community.** This attorney cares about his reputation and is more likely to be available in the future when you need help.

**Tip #9: Choose an attorney who is a respected source of information** -- one who has dedicated his practice to helping people understand their estate planning alternatives.

**Tip #10: Choose an attorney who charges fair fees.** At best, you get what you pay for. Most people do not shop for the cheapest doctor. Instead, they focus on the doctor's qualifications and experience. You should apply the same principle when selecting an attorney who is skilled at Asset Protection, Estate Planning, Elder Law and Medicaid Planning, Trust and Probate Administration, and Probate and Trust Repair. If the fee is too low, the lawyer may be leaving something out. Make sure the fee you pay and the services you receive are of equal value.

**Tip #11: Choose an attorney who asks for and receives detailed information regarding your family and assets.** As surprising as this sounds, some attorneys don't get information from families. If those attorneys don't get this information, how can they possibly make sound recommendations about your Asset Protection and Estate Plan.

Also, ask specific questions about your estate and your objectives, such as: "How do I protect my children from abusive relatives if something happens to me?" "Can I keep my kids from controlling their entire inheritance at age 18?" "Can I protect my children's money from creditors?" "How can I leave money for my child's education?"