

From The Law Office of AMBER RODRIGUEZ

How Do I Choose an Attorney? By Amber Rodriguez

Many people will reach a point in life where they need the assistance of an attorney. This can be an uncomfortable process. But it doesn't have to be that way. By following some simple steps, you can find an attorney who best suits your needs.

First, as an attorney myself, I like to remind people that attorneys are people too. There are attorneys who are, well, not the most friendly people and there are attorneys who are, well, more likeable. Attorneys are parents, have basic day-to-day responsibilities, and, for some at least, interests outside of practicing law. Some attorneys even have a sense of humor. Most attorneys do not fit the "profile" people imagine when they hear the word "attorney."

Second, practicing law, like practicing medicine, is not an exact science. You may meet with three different attorneys and get three different opinions. Some of the answers should overlap, but each attorney may have a different idea on how best to address your needs.

Finally, try to find an attorney who practices in the area in which you need assistance. The example I like to use is this: Electricians and plumbers are both contractors, but would you hire an electrician to fix your leaky sink? In the practice of law, you are more likely to find the help you need if you speak to attorneys who regularly practice in the particular area of law in which you need assistance.

That being said, how do you find an attorney? Most people start by getting personal references from their friends, family, or professional associates. But sometimes you may need to do some research on your own. You can do this by using some simple tools available to you on the internet.

Many websites and tools are available on the internet to help you find an attorney. You can visit the state bar website (calbar.org in California) or one of many websites that now offers information on professionals (lawyers.com or avvo.com, for example). You can also search your local court to see how many, and what type, of cases a particular attorney has handled. In Ventura County, for instance, you could go to the Ventura County Superior Court website and run a search by a particular attorney's name.

These tools, while helpful, shouldn't take the place of a face-to-face meeting with your potential attorney. You should find an attorney you trust and who shares your view points on how best to manage your case. This doesn't mean you should choose an attorney who will do whatever you tell them to do. Some of the best attorneys I know often offer their clients advice that their clients don't want to hear. But our job is to look out for you, help you through this unfamiliar territory, and give you some peace of mind.

It may even be helpful to meet with a few attorneys before you make a final decision. Don't be discouraged if a consultation fee is charged. You are making an investment. It is most likely worth the time and money to help you make a thoughtful decision. Finding the right attorney for you will make your journey through the legal process you are facing less stressful and more productive. And that is something we can all use a little more of in life.