

LAW BULLETIN

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Cusimano, Keener, Roberts, Kimberley & Miles, P.C.

How To Choose A Lawyer

By: Betsy Boggs

If you, a family member, or friend need a lawyer, how do you find the best one to meet that need? Did you know that you can select a lawyer the same way a lawyer would choose one to represent someone they care about? Below are some ways that will be helpful:

- Check the peer review listings;
- Satisfy yourself that they (or their firm) can do what they say they can do;
- Find out about their experience;
- Do they teach and publish articles/books;
- Are you comfortable with them;
- Remember lots of advertising does not a good lawyer make.

PEER REVIEW

Did you know that lawyers rate other lawyers? There are two national services that survey lawyers about the skill and honesty of other lawyers. You can and should check both of them. The books are probably in your local library, or they can be found on the Internet.

1. **Martindale Hubble** is a service that rates most lawyers in the nation. Their highest rating is "AV".
 - (a) Legal Ability Ratings take into account professional ability, the lawyer's expertise, and other professional qualifications.

Legal Ability Ratings are:

A - Very High to Preeminent

B - High to Very High

C - Good to High

- (b) The Ethical Standards Rating relates to standards of conduct, ethics, reliability, and diligence. A lawyer must receive a "V" (Very High) rating before they can receive a legal rating. When both categories of Peer Review Ratings are confirmed, a lawyer receives a CV, BV or AV Rating. Generally a lawyer must be in practice five years before they are rated. **Web page www.martindale.com**

2. **The Best Lawyers in America®** is widely regarded as the preeminent referral guide to the legal profession in the United States. The Best Lawyers lists, representing 30 specialties in all 50 states, are compiled through an exhaustive peer-review survey in which thousands of the top lawyers in the U.S. confidentially evaluate their professional peers. The current edition is based on more than 350,000 detailed evaluations of lawyers by other lawyers. **Web Page www.bestlawyers.com/search.**

CAN THEY DO WHAT THEY SAY?

Can the lawyer do what they say they can do? Do you expect them to do the work? Can a lawyer be all things to all people? These are questions you should ask. No one lawyer can do everything well, although many can do many things well. Does the lawyer imply they are expert in all areas? Do you need a specialist? Are you considering a firm with several lawyers specializing in different areas? Do they have adequate resources to handle your case? There are good general practitioners who refer cases to specialists. In Alabama, with few exceptions, lawyers aren't allowed to advertise their specialties, so you must find out if the lawyer specializes in the area you need. Are they just collecting and farming out cases? Some lawyers advertise to collect cases, and don't expect to work on the cases themselves. They just send them to someone else. There is nothing wrong with referring a case to a specialist as long as the case gets to a good lawyer, but you should know at the outset what to expect. Wouldn't you want to know who you are hiring?

EXPERIENCE?

What is their experience? How many cases like yours have they handled successfully? What is their record? Often the best lawyer for you is a hometown lawyer. They know the local system and all the court personnel. The idea that an "out of town" lawyer is better is often just wrong. What do they charge? Ask up front. Choosing a lawyer, like choosing a surgeon, based on who charges the least makes no sense. On a case where the lawyer charges on a contingency fee, (no fee unless recovery) you are usually better off with an experienced successful lawyer than one who charges a smaller percentage. What you ultimately receive because of their skill, rather than the percentage they charge, is the important factor.

TEACHING, TRAINING & PUBLISHING

Does the lawyer teach and train other lawyers in his or her field? Have they published articles and books on the subject of your case? If other lawyers depend on the expertise of a lawyer, you generally would be served well to do the same.

ADVERTISING and YELLOW PAGES

Do they have offices near you? Some lawyers who advertise in the yellow pages don't even have an office in the area in which they advertise. Are they volume lawyers, or do they limit the number of cases they handle? Do they have the time to handle your case properly? The biggest ad doesn't mean they are the

best lawyers, but it doesn't mean they are not either. Many of the best lawyers do little, if any, advertising. If they have a web page, check it out.

MATCHING WHAT YOU NEED WITH WHAT THEY DO

Ultimately you should try to answer these questions in order to match your needs with a particular lawyer:

1. When you met with them, were you comfortable with them?
2. Did they answer all your questions in a straightforward, honest way?
3. Do they seem to really care and want to help?

Once you make up your mind, put your trust and confidence in the lawyer - unless they breach your trust.

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No representation is made that the quality of the legal services to be performed is greater than the quality of legal services performed by any other lawyer.