

How to Find the Right a Personal Injury, Car Accident, or other Injury Accident Attorney for you.

Choosing an attorney to represent you is an important but daunting task. The decision certainly should not be made on the basis of advertising alone. The Yellow Pages are filled with ads - all of which say basically the same thing. You should not hire based solely on advertising - anyone can buy a slick commercial. Similarly, you should not hire solely based on a flashy website that provides little, if any good solid information on the injury claim process.

We are sure there are many personal injury attorneys in your local community, but which one is best for your case? We believe there are some specific questions to ask that will help you find the best person for your case in any area of law. You may have to do a little work to find the right attorney, but that's OK because the decision as to who your attorney will be is very important.

A good first step is to find an attorney who regularly handles injury cases. We believe the legal arena of personal injury and malpractice is much too specialized and complex for someone who does not regularly handle these cases. You do not want to be the case that breaks a lawyer into a new area of practice. It's better for you if your attorney has already traveled through any learning curve and knows what the insurance companies will argue. Nor do you want to be a client of a law firm that is an injury mill where hundreds of cases are handled with next to no personal contact from firm attorneys, not knowing who really is working on your case or looking out for your specific needs.

You should also know that insurance companies keep a list of which attorneys and law firms actually go to court and win injury cases. They also keep a list of those attorneys and law firms that avoid the courtroom like the plague and settle all their cases. Why do we tell you this? Because the insurance companies use this information to decide how they will negotiate and handle a claim. One question an insurance adjuster asks when a serious claim lands on her desk is: who is the attorney for the plaintiff? **If the insurance company considers this they must believe it is important. Shouldn't it be important to you too?**

If you are represented by an attorney or law firm that has never been to court and actually tried an injury case, or who handles lots of car accident cases but settles them all, you may not be in the best of hands. We believe that it is of the highest importance that you find a qualified and experienced personal injury attorney.

So how do you find out who is good in your area? Here are some tips.

1. Do you personally know an attorney? Get a referral from that attorney. He or she will likely know someone who has experience handling cases like yours.
2. The Yellow Pages can actually be a good source of names of attorneys in your local area. Remember, not everyone advertises in the Yellow Pages. We have a small ad in the yellow pages just so people can find us. However, most of our cases come from referrals from clients and other attorneys. Also, be careful about the ads that claim to focus on too many different areas of law. No one can be good at everything!
3. Your local or state bar association likely has some kind of lawyer referral service. However, keep in mind that lawyers listed on the service may or may not have paid a fee to be listed in certain practice areas. Their names come up on a rotating basis. The name you get from the bar association is another good source for an initial appointment. Simply take the questions we talk about here to that interview.
4. Interview a few attorneys. Ask each attorney if they have any printed information and/or a website where you can find additional information about his/her experience, qualifications, the injury claim process, and how he/she handles a case before you walk in the office for that interview.
5. Be leery of any attorneys who contact you without an invitation to do so. Some attorneys make it a habit to send accident victims letters shortly after the accident in an attempt to gain their business. If you are contacted without an introduction from a friend or family member the only purpose should be to provide you with free information that you can look at when convenient.
6. Check with the licensing agency for attorneys in your state for any disciplinary actions that may raise questions about the attorney's character, ethics, or competency. In Washington the Washington State Bar Association handles all complaints and discipline taken against attorneys, www.wsba.org. If an attorney has had complaints, pay special attention to whether an investigation was opened or whether any disciplinary action resulted. Anyone can submit an unsupported complaint against an attorney out of spite or ill will from losing a case. It's a different matter if the agency takes action that results in discipline.
7. Here are some things to look for and question your attorney about. Please remember that not every attorney will fulfill each of these factors, but the significant absence of the following should be a big question mark.
 - **Experience** - obviously, the longer an attorney has been handling cases in a particular area of the law, the more he or she will know. Experience is a big factor in most cases.

- **Experience actually trying cases** - ask the attorney how many cases he has actually tried. Has he or she achieved any noteworthy verdicts or settlements for his or her clients? The more cases actually tried and substantial verdicts and settlements achieved, the more the insurance companies will respect you. Request a list of past settlements and verdicts. If the attorney refuses, doesn't have one, or gives you some excuse for not giving it to you this might not be the right fit for you. Past performance does not mean future success, but past results can indicate some level of experience and success.
- **Membership in trial lawyer association.** In our area, you can easily find a lawyer who is a member of the Washington Trial Lawyers Association. This organization provides extensive education and networking for trial lawyers.
- **Educational materials** - has your attorney written any education focused articles or special reports you can read?

8. How will you be kept informed about the progress of your case? In our law firm, we generally keep in regular contact with each client to provide updates on the progress of her or his case. We also take time to explain how a case is typically handled and in what time frames the client can expect activity to take place. We invite our clients to call or email us when an issue arises. We do our best to return every call or email within 24 hours. You are also invited to make an appointment to come in at a time that is convenient for you.

9. Find out who will actually be working on your case. Make sure that you and your attorney have a firm understanding as to who will be handling your case. There are a lot of things that go on with a case that do not require the senior attorney's attention and, in fact, are more efficiently handled by younger attorneys or legal assistants. On the other hand, if you are hiring an attorney because of his or her trial skills, make sure that that person is going to be trying your case for you.

Before You Make That Appointment To Interview An Attorney or Talk To The Insurance Company You Should Get Our Special Report, *THE GUIDE TO WASHINGTON INJURY CASES*. Our special report will give you valuable information about handling your injury.