

## **HOW TO HIRE AN ATTORNEY AND TALK ABOUT YOUR CASE: QUICK TIPS**

### **1. READ THE STATE BAR TIPS FOR FINDING AND HIRING THE RIGHT ATTORNEY**

The California State Bar has an excellent guide on how to find and hire the right attorney for you. You can find the guide here:

[www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/Pamphlets/HiringALawyer.aspx](http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/Pamphlets/HiringALawyer.aspx).

This Quick Tips sheet will highlight some of the more important points about finding and hiring an attorney.

### **2. BEWARE OF SCAM ATTORNEYS**

Not all attorneys want to help you. Some attorneys just want your money.

Always check the website for the California State Bar [www.calbar.ca.gov](http://www.calbar.ca.gov) to find out if an attorney has been in trouble with the State Bar before you make a decision to hire someone.

### **3. HIRE AN ATTORNEY WITH EXPERIENCE HANDLING YOUR TYPE OF LEGAL PROBLEM**

Attorneys do not know everything about every type of law. Many attorneys specialize. This is especially true in the areas of family law and probate/estate planning law. For other areas of law, ask the attorney about his or her experience handling cases like yours. You do not want to hire an attorney who needs to learn the law – you want an attorney who knows the law well and has had many clients with cases like yours.

### **4. WHAT IS THE SHORT STORY OF YOUR CASE?**

You do not need to tell the entire story to find out if an attorney can help you. Generally, you will call an attorney's office and talk to the attorney's assistant before you meet with the attorney or get a chance for a telephone consultation with the attorney. Start by telling the attorney's office your type of legal problem, for example, bankruptcy or preventing foreclosure. If they handle the kind of law you need, tell them the "short version" of your story, or your short story. How would you sum up your case if you only had three minutes? Practice with someone you trust. This simple step will make your search for an attorney much easier and less frustrating. Once you meet with the attorney or have a phone consultation, you can tell the longer version of the story.

**5. IF YOU GOT SUED OR HAVE AN ONGOING COURT CASE, LET THE ATTORNEY KNOW AS PART OF YOUR SHORT STORY.**

If you need to respond to a lawsuit or you are already involved in a court case, let the attorney know this as part of your “short story.” This is critical information for any attorney assessing a legal case. Have your court case number with you – the attorney may want to look it up on line while talking to you. Make sure you let the attorney know whether or not a different attorney ever worked with you on your case as part of your short story.

**6. CONSULTATIONS WITH AN ATTORNEY CAN SAVE YOU TIME AND MONEY**

A legal consultation is a meeting or telephone call where an attorney gives you advice about your case. Some attorneys provide free consultations and others charge. Consultations are useful for getting a general idea about the law for your kind of case. Remember, an attorney cannot give you advice specific to your case unless he or she has enough information. Attorneys will often only give general advice in a telephone consultation. You may need a more in-depth consultation to find out about your case in particular. In-depth consultations, including extended interviews with you and a review of documents, are not usually free but can be useful in finding out if you have a good case and if it is worth it to hire an attorney.

**7. FIND OUT THE TIME LIMITS THAT APPLY TO YOUR TYPE OF CASE**

You cannot wait forever to bring a lawsuit. You have to act within time limits set by law. These time limits are called statutes of limitations. You can find out general information about the statute of limitations in your case by getting a consultation with an attorney. If your problem happened many years ago, let the attorney know as part of your short story. You may need to get a more in-depth consultation to determine the exact statute of limitations for your case.

**8. UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LAWYER WILL AND WILL NOT DO FOR YOU**

Once you hire an attorney, you will usually need to sign a retainer agreement or letter of engagement. The agreement will spell out what the attorney will do for you and what the attorney will not do for you. It is important to read and understand this document before you sign it. Ask questions. If you do not understand something, ask.