

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR LAWYER

Like just about any other business, the legal profession operates in an extremely competitive buyers' market. As a result, you should receive just as much customer-oriented service from your lawyer as you give to your own clients. This article will discuss the level of customer service you can reasonably expect from your lawyer. We will also discuss ways in which you might find a good lawyer.

What training does a lawyer receive?

In order to know what to you can reasonably expect from your lawyer, you should know about the training needed to become a lawyer.

In the days of Abraham Lincoln, an individual could become a lawyer by studying books containing laws and written rulings made by judges and by working for a lawyer as a clerk. Those days are gone. Now, to become a lawyer, an individual first must do the following: (1) graduate from a four-year college, (2) achieve a sufficient score on a standardized test called a Law Scholastic Aptitude Test, (3) complete at least three years of full-time law school studies, and (4) pass a two-day-long bar exam.

All this education is really only the beginning. Some lawyers take one or more additional years of graduate law school to obtain a Masters degree. Many lawyers also periodically attend seminars conducted by bar associations.

What can you reasonably expect from your lawyer?

At the top of the list, of course, is quality work. It may be difficult for clients who are not attorneys to know whether their lawyer is providing quality work. One way to measure quality is to set a goal with your lawyer at the very beginning. Tell your lawyer what you expect when the project is completed and find out from the lawyer whether he or she will be able to meet those expectations. For example, if you want to draft a standard contract for your use with all your clients, tell the lawyer what you are trying to accomplish. Your lawyer should then tell you whether your expectations can be met. If your lawyer tells you that your expectations might not be achievable, the lawyer should explain the reasons.

After you and your lawyer reach an understanding regarding your goals, your lawyer should confirm this in writing. Your lawyer's confirmation should also state the cost for the project and the time by which payment is due.

You may need to communicate with your lawyer while the project is underway. Your lawyer should promptly return your telephone calls, and

your lawyer should send you copies of all pertinent documents that she or he prepares or receives in connection with your project. If you need to meet with your lawyer, you should not be kept waiting too long. Furthermore, your lawyer should be able to explain things in language that you can understand. Finally, your lawyer should always be courteous.

When the project is complete, your lawyer should give you copies of the final documents in a neat, well-organized package. Your lawyer should also keep copies of all the documents if needed for future reference.

You should remember that lawyers are human. Because they are human, they make mistakes. If your lawyer does make a mistake, he or she should admit it and do whatever is necessary to correct it, at no cost to you. Also, because they are human, lawyers are not omniscient. This means that you must fully and honestly answer your lawyer's questions. Also, there may be times when your lawyer is relying on someone else to do something or provide information. For example, your lawyer may rely on a research service to disclose a particular fact. If the research service makes a mistake, it may not be your lawyer's fault.

How to find a good lawyer.

Finding a good lawyer may take some work. Ask for referrals from family members, friends, and other business people who you respect. Go to the library to see if the lawyer has published articles or books on a legal issue pertinent to your situation. When you have a list of names, call the lawyers and ask if you can take a few minutes of their time. Ask your candidates about their particular training and experience. Get a few references from the lawyer-that is, clients for whom the lawyer has provided similar services. Visit the office of your top candidate so that you can see for yourself the resources available to that lawyer. Above all, do not be intimidated by the lawyer. The law business is competitive, and after all, you are the customer