

# Getting The Right Criminal Defense Attorney

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When you or someone you know are charged with a crime, selecting the right lawyer for the case can be the hardest part of the whole ordeal. Issues of ability, price, and experience are all important. Criminal defense attorneys fight for what they believe in. If your defense attorney believes in your innocence, he or she will do the research and put forth the effort to ensure your vindication. Defense attorneys fight for the preservation and continuation of everyone's constitutional rights.

A common stereotype of criminal defense lawyers is that their only role in court is to question witnesses with a prepared set of questions. However, this stereotype is misleading because a defense attorney's role in court involves much more than that. For example, they have the opportunity to negotiate with prosecutors in an attempt to lessen charges or sentences.

When you or someone you know are charged with a crime, selecting the right lawyer for the case can be the hardest part of the whole ordeal. Issues of ability, price, and experience are all important. Equally important, however, is the relationship and attitude of the lawyer and his or her staff.

Having an experienced, hard-working, and [knowledgeable criminal defense attorney](#) on your side is the only way to have a good chance in court. Please review the steps below to help you make an informed decision.

- Get a criminal defense attorney who concentrates his [practice in the area of defense](#) that you need.
- Public defenders get a bad rap, but they are the most experienced criminal defense lawyers. In spite of popular opinion, public defenders are extremely skilled (in general), and are often consulted by private attorneys, because they have seen more of the criminal justice system than others.
- Determine what kind of qualities are important to you. Do you want someone young and who is willing to make up for a lack of experience through hard work, or someone with well-established credentials? Does your case require someone who has special knowledge of a certain area of criminal law (like tax law or SEC investigations), or will any criminal lawyer be sufficient?
- Ask friends if they know (or have experience with) a criminal defense attorney. This is not the time to hire your 3rd cousin who once won a speeding ticket case for your uncle. If you are charged with a crime that can cause you to have a criminal record, you need someone who knows exactly what he or she is doing.
- Find out what legal organizations the lawyer belongs to. At the very least, he should belong to the County and State Bar Associations. If he belongs to the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL), his State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, or to the ABA's Criminal Justice Section, that

is a good indication he has more than a passing interest in criminal defense.

- Determine if he has ever held an office in any of the organizations of which he is a member. Bar association activities are good indications of how the lawyer's colleagues feel about him.
- Don't be fooled by advertising slogans, such as "former deputy district attorney" or "aggressive trial lawyer." Meet the lawyer and decide if you have confidence in his or her skills and feel comfortable with their analysis of your case.
- Inquire if the attorney you are interviewing has ever taught at a law school (or CLE program) or published a legal article.
- Ask who will work on your case if you hire this attorney, and what their experience level is. Ask what rates they bill at. What percentage of work will these other people be doing, and what percentage of time will your attorney be dedicating to your case? Now is also a good time to find out what would happen to your case if your attorney became ill or unexpectedly became unavailable.
- Discuss the facts of your case. At this point, attorneys should be able to discuss how he will proceed and what he will do. You should discuss law office communications and what ancillary services he thinks you will need (e.g. psychotherapy, private investigation, etc).
- Remember there is no official list of the best lawyers. There is no official "win/loss" rate. Be very suspicious of attorneys who claim to "specialize" in a certain type of case, unless that lawyer is a State Bar Certified Specialist. A lawyer may concentrate in an area but may not claim to be a specialist unless an outside agency certified to make the designation so awards him with that designation.

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