

Guidebook

15 Questions

To Ask Before Hiring a
Defense Attorney



CONTENT

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 01 | INTRODUCTION | 08 | WILL YOU BE THE ONE WORKING ON MY CASE? |
| 02 | HOW LONG HAVE YOU PRACTICED CRIMINAL LAW? | | HOW STRONG IS MY CASE? |
| 03 | CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CREDENTIALS? | 09 | WHAT STRATEGY WOULD YOU PROPOSE FOR HANDLING MY CASE? |
| 04 | DO YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH CASES LIKE MINE? | | DO I HAVE ANY OPTIONS BESIDES GOING TO TRIAL? |
| | WHAT IS YOUR SUCCESS RATE? | 10 | WHAT WILL MY ROLE BE IN THE CASE? |
| 05 | DO YOU HAVE ANY TESTIMONIALS FROM PAST CLIENTS THAT I CAN READ? | 11 | HOW LONG WILL THE PROCESS BE? |
| 06 | HOW OFTEN DO YOUR CASES GO TO TRIAL? | | HOW AND HOW OFTEN WILL WE COMMUNICATE? |
| 07 | HOW OFTEN DO YOU APPEAR IN THE COURTHOUSE WHERE MY CASE WILL BE HEARD? | 12 | HOW MUCH WILL MY DEFENSE COST? |

INTRODUCTION

If you're facing a criminal charge, you want a lawyer who can protect your future and secure the best possible outcome. These 15 questions will help you to decide if the lawyer you are considering hiring is a good fit for your case:



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1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU PRACTICED CRIMINAL LAW?

It's best to hire a lawyer with experience handling cases like yours. That's why you want someone who is focused on the practice of criminal law. The right criminal defense lawyer can use their knowledge and experience of the criminal justice system to negotiate the best possible outcome for your case.



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2. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CREDENTIALS?

You'll want to ensure your lawyer is properly qualified to represent you. So feel free to ask about their qualifications and credentials. It's also important that your lawyer is in good standing with the legal system. You don't want to risk your future with an attorney with a track record of professional misconduct!



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3. DO YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH CASES LIKE MINE?

You should hire a lawyer with substantial experience defending cases similar to yours. For example, if you've been charged with a DUI, you should look for a lawyer who has handled lots of DUI cases. A criminal lawyer with this specific type of experience will know the best strategies for your defense.

4. WHAT IS YOUR SUCCESS RATE?

No lawyer can guarantee you'll win (and be wary of those who do). But a track record of dismissals, not-guilty verdicts, and reduced charges for clients in similar situations to yours is a positive sign.



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5. DO YOU HAVE TESTIMONIALS FROM PAST CLIENTS?

Most attorneys will have testimonials from former clients. Reading these can give you insight into what it will be like to work with a prospective lawyer. In addition, you may learn insights into their personality, communication skills, and level of professionalism.



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6. HOW MANY OF YOUR CASES GO TO TRIAL?

It is always best to hire a lawyer with the experience and skills to negotiate with the prosecution. Most criminal cases are resolved this way. Good attorneys know how to use these negotiations to get a favorable outcome for their clients. And they can even get the charges dropped altogether. On the other hand, if your case goes to trial, you'll want to know your lawyer has plenty of courtroom experience.



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7. HOW OFTEN DO YOU APPEAR IN THE COURTHOUSE WHERE MY CASE WILL BE HEARD

It's wise to hire a lawyer who has good connections with the prosecutors, judges, and law enforcement officials in your area. With these relationships, your lawyer will know what to expect from each individual prosecutor and have a good sense of which defense tactics are most likely to deliver a good outcome.



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8. WILL YOU BE THE ONE WORKING ON MY CASE?

Bigger law firms may delegate some (or all) of your casework to junior lawyers. These less experienced lawyers work at a lower hourly rate. That can be a good thing because it results in lower legal fees. But beware, a junior lawyer might lack the knowledge and skill to win a favorable outcome in your case.

9. HOW STRONG IS MY CASE?

You shouldn't expect a definitive answer to this question. But an experienced criminal lawyer will have handled many cases similar to yours. And will be able to give you a range of likely outcomes in your case. They will also be able to advise you on the best strategy for your defense.

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10. WHAT STRATEGY WILL YOU USE FOR MY DEFENSE?

This is a good question for assessing your lawyer's competence. A criminal lawyer with experience in handling cases similar to yours will know which defense strategies are most likely to gain a favorable outcome in your case. It's also important to know ahead of time what tactics your lawyer will use so that you're comfortable with their strategy.

11. WILL MY CASE GO TO TRIAL?

Many criminal charges are resolved by a plea bargain. This is an agreement in which the defendant pleads guilty to a lesser charge, typically in exchange for some form of leniency. Ask if your criminal defense lawyer thinks this is a good strategy for your case.



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12. WHAT WILL MY ROLE BE IN THE CASE?

You may be asked to play a role in your own defense. So ask your lawyer what's expected of you. Will you have to gather evidence? What paperwork will you need? Will you have to testify in court?



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13. HOW LONG WILL THE PROCESS BE?

Your lawyer should be able to provide you with a rough estimate of how long the process will take. This estimate will be based on the agreed-upon strategy for your defense. This is an important question because it helps you prepare for the process.



14. HOW WILL YOU COMMUNICATE WITH ME?

You should discuss how your lawyer communicates with their clients – and how often. Every criminal defense lawyer has a different approach to communication, so you want to work with someone who communicates in a way that works for you.

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15. HOW MUCH WILL MY DEFENSE COST?

Your lawyer should be up-front with you about their fees. Hiring an experienced lawyer is an important investment in your future, so it's essential to know how much you'll be expected to pay – and when!



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