

Who Not to Hire

**A Woman's Guide to Finding the
Right Divorce Lawyer**

By:

Jackie Stanley, ESQ

JackieStanley.com

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Introduction: How Does a Lawyer Sleep?

First he lies on one side then he lies on the other side. Ordinarily I don't make a habit of repeating lawyer jokes. And not because I don't think some of them are funny. In fact, my sense of humor is such that I will pretty much laugh at anything—including myself and my profession. That's why I don't have a problem with lawyer jokes. However, I do have a problem with lawyers who behave in a way that personifies the negative sentiments infused in the lawyer jokes.

There is nothing at all funny about the stories I have heard about lawyers behaving badly. On the third Thursday of each month, I conduct a legal self-help workshop called *Breaking Up and Moving On!* It is designed to provide women going through divorce with free legal advice.

The workshops are always well attended: some months there are as many as fifty women present. The participants share one horrible story after another about the circumstances that compelled them to attend the workshop. Sometimes I have to fight back tears as I listen to women describe the physical abuse they have suffered from an alcoholic or drug-addicted spouse, how they are losing their home because of a spouse gambling addiction or the years of humiliation they have suffered as a result of husband's philandering.

Listening to these stories breaks my heart. But they are not the only horror stories I hear each month at these workshops. It is the stories the women tell about their attorneys that really cause my blood to boil and my pressure to rise. Last month, a woman shared this story: She hired a well-known local attorney to handle her divorce case, which included claims for alimony, custody and property settlement.

Eighteen months had passed, she had paid \$20,000 in legal fees (she had the cancelled checks to prove her claim) and none of the issues had been resolved. She said whenever she called the

attorney's office she was forced to speak with her assistant and on the rare occasions when she did speak directly with the attorney, the attorney would never give her straight answers to her questions. And to add insult to injury, a few days later she would receive a bill for time the attorney spent on the phone giving her the run around. So she stopped calling and decided to attend one of my free workshops.

I created the workshop to help women who do not have attorneys. I assumed that women with attorneys would not need to attend a free workshop to get their legal questions answered. My assumptions were incorrect, because much to my surprise at least one-third of the women who attend these workshops have already hired an attorney. And they don't come to bad-mouth their attorney; they come hoping to get answers.

What is the moral of this story and stories like these? The most important thing about being a good lawyer is something lawyers do not have to go to law school to learn. It is called the Golden Rule. The lawyer that's right for you will treat you the way he or she would want to be treated. The wrong lawyer will do unto you whatever you let him or her get away with while at the same time getting as much money as he or she can out of you. The bottom line is this: women who hire the wrong attorney are no better off than women who have no attorney at all.

And that is why I decided to write this book. I want to help you hire the right attorney for you. What can you expect? Here's a chapter-by-chapter breakdown: In Chapter Two, you will learn how to avoid the biggest mistake women make when hiring an attorney. In Chapter Three, you will be introduced to the three different professional personas most attorneys have adopted and I will give you insight on what persona may work best for your situation. In Chapter Four, I will identify seven superficial considerations that you should not allow to cloud your decision about who you should or should not hire. In Chapter Five, you will discover the best way to find referrals. In Chapter Six, I have listed the tough questions you need to ask an attorney before you agree to hire him or her. In Chapter Seven, I will tell you whom not to hire. In Chapter Eight, I will share some advice on how to ensure that once you find the right attorney you are able to maintain a good working relationship. In Chapter Nine, the final chapter, I included a checklist that will help you put the advice contained in this book into action.

Lawyers love disclaimers and I am no exception. So, here's mine: This book is not designed to supplant your natural instincts and intuition. If after reading this book, you meet an attorney who is everything I suggest you should avoid, you should always move confidently in the direction of your instincts. Because at the end of the day no one knows you better than you know you. And only you can really know who or what is right for you.

Chapter Two: The Big, Fat, Hairy Mistake

What is the biggest mistake people make when hiring an attorney?

Let me give you a hint:

It is the same big fat hairy mistake people make in their personal life: They hook up—by that I mean they enter into a serious relationship—with someone with whom they are completely and utterly incompatible.

If you have been fortunate enough to avoid this mistake, I would bet real money that you know someone (and probably more than one someone) who has not been so lucky.

I have a friend who has a television in every room in her house. Yes, that includes her two bathrooms. She has the televisions strategically placed so no matter where she sits or stands she has an unobstructed view of her favorite programs. This woman loves watching television so much that she plans her days, evenings and vacations around what's coming on television. She has even used her sick leave to stay home and watch a 24-hour marathon of her favorite sitcom.

When her marriage ended abruptly less than year after her stroll down the aisle, she said it was due in large part to the fact that her husband did not like watching television. She wanted to spend her evenings watching *The Voice*; he wanted to go out with friends and sing karaoke.

Why would someone whose life revolves around television marry someone who hates it?

That is a perfectly good question. I am hopeful that one day in the not too distant future, my friend will be able to look back on her marriage, learn from and maybe even laugh about her poor decision to marry Mr. Karaoke. However, until that time, I have resisted the temptation to start any conversations about her marriage that begin with the word *why*.

So, your perfectly good question about my friend will have to go unanswered.

However, I am prepared to offer a theory as to why people hire attorneys with whom they are not compatible. I think it is because most people believe all lawyers are alike. And because they think they are all the same, they do not see any point in seeking out one that's right for them.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Your ability to find a lawyer that's right for you is directly proportional to your ability to view lawyers the same way Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston suggested we view people from races different from our own: She said: "Light came to me when I realized that I did not have to consider any group as a whole. God made people duck by duck and that was the only way I could see them."

"Duck by duck" is also the only way to view lawyers. I must confess whenever I share this concept with workshop participants, there is always at least one person who looks at me cross-eyed and lets me know they are not interested in buying what I am selling.

But what I discover, again and again, is that the people who reject the notion that lawyers should be judged on a case-by-case basis have never actually hired an attorney. So, how does someone who has had little or no one-on-one contact with attorneys acquire such entrenched negative beliefs about them?

It happens because (unless we were juvenile delinquents), most of our initial encounters with an attorney happened while watching television. And because first impressions are the most enduring, it is difficult to shake the image of the one-dimensional television lawyer who—more often than not—is depicted as a greedy, fast-talking, heartless, morally challenged egomaniac.

Have I ever been successful in changing someone's mind about attorneys once it is made up? It may be a stretch to claim I have changed anyone's mind, but I believe I am able to open participant's mind to the possibility that what I am suggesting is the truth about lawyers by asking two fairly simple questions. Here is the first question:

What do television personality Star Jones, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi, legendary sportscaster Howard Cosell, consumer activist Ralph Nader, and Austrian novelist Franz Kafka have in common?

Usually after a few false starts, someone will point out that they are all lawyers. Then, I ask the

second question: What characteristics besides being a lawyer do they *all* share? At this point the room usually goes quiet as the participants struggle to respond, and I take this opportunity to make my case. I tell them that this question is hard to answer because the legal profession is made of an infinite variety of lawyers. I remind them that if we allow ourselves to believe the fallacy that lawyers are all the same we may become reluctant to expend the time and energy needed to find the lawyer that is perfectly suited to both our personality and situation.

Your lawyer must be perfect. Yes, I said perfect.

Perfect does not mean to be without flaw. It actually means to be looked upon as good. I am encouraging you to find an attorney that is a good fit for you. I hesitated, just for a second, to use the word “perfect” because I feared it would place unnecessary stress on you as you search for an attorney. And we all know stress sometimes leads to paralysis.

To get you moving, I offer the same assurance I shared with a recently unemployed neighbor as we listened to the evening news anchor interview an economist who claimed that several hundred thousand jobs would need to be created each month to bring the country to full employment. Despite the dismal national economic forecast, I reminded my friend that she did not need to find one-hundred thousand jobs, she only needed to find one job to be fully employed. If you forget everything else I have said thus far, please, please keep this in mind: You only need to find one attorney who is right for you.

Chapter Three: Technicians, Counselors, and Attack Dogs

As I was writing this book, I came across an article about a professional matchmaker who earns millions each year helping rich men who are too busy to socialize to find the women of their dreams. The men who seek out her services must be willing to do more than just write a big check. Before she will accept a man as a client he must undergo a rigorous application process that includes completing a 100-page questionnaire and submitting to an intensive interview. And once she is retained, she takes him out on two or three practice dates prior to introducing him to potential soul mates.

Her track record for making lasting connections was impressive. The article included testimonials from many of her satisfied customers who are now happily married to women they met through her. At least two of the couples interviewed for the article had been married more than twenty years. The more I read about her, the more jealous I became of her.

What does the million-dollar matchmaker got that I don't have?

Besides a million-dollar income, she has the ability to sit down and really get to know each of her clients before attempting to find their one and only. She indicated that this was the secret to her success.

If I could get to know you as well as the matchmaker can get to her know her clients, I too could provide you with the complete dossier of the attorney you should hire. However, let's face it: The scope of this book won't allow me to do anything that would come remotely close to what the matchmaker does with her clients. But I learned a long time ago to never let what I can't do stop me from doing what I can do.

So, while I can't give you the name and number of the lawyer that's right for you, in the next

section I will introduce you to three different professional personas that most attorneys have adopted. I refer to them as the Technician, the Counselor, and the Attack Dog. Taking time to carefully examine each of these is important because an attorney's professional persona reflects more than just his or her personality; it can give you invaluable insight on how he or she engages and interacts with clients.

Forgive me if I am stating the obvious, but I want to make something clear: The terms I have used to describe each of the personas are for illustrative purposes only. They are not “words of art,” which means if you use them with someone who has not read this book, he or she may have no clue what you are talking about. That said, let's look at the three personas in detail.

The Technician

If you ever find yourself sitting down across the table from a Technician, don't expect them to spend a lot of time on small talk. He or she is not likely to ask about your weekend or compliment you on your new handbag. A Technician's primary—and maybe even exclusive—focus will be on the facts of your case. In their minds the facts matter more than you do.

In the eyes of a Technician, they don't represent people; they handle cases. That's why they primarily want to know the “who, what, where and when” of whatever problem it is that you need them to solve. If you show up in their office because you were cited for speeding through a school zone, they are only concerned with how fast you were driving. They may express little or no interest in how embarrassed you felt about being pulled over by the police with your teenage son in the car whom you had just grounded for two weeks for speeding.

There is a good chance in your search for the attorney that's right for you that you will cross paths with a Technician. The legal profession is filled with them. Why is that? The training lawyers receive in law school emphasizes technical legal issues like contracts, real property, estates and torts. I don't know of any law schools that offer courses in social interaction or emotional expression. And most importantly, and I know that I am using a broad brush, but most of the people who become law professors do so because they love the law, not because they love

people. Technicians produce Technicians.

In the interest of full disclosure, I feel I should let you know that I am pretty sure my clients can attest to the fact that I am not a Technician. But contrary to whatever bias you may have detected in my depiction I don't have anything against attorneys who are. In fact there may be certain type of cases in which they may be uniquely suited.

Cases that don't require a lot of one-on-one face time are an example. These types of cases include: business matters such as incorporations or collections; routine patent, trademark, and copyright matters; transactional matters such as real estate closings; minor traffic matters and simple estate matters such as preparing a will. The less time you have to spend interacting with your attorney the less their personality—or lack thereof—will matter to you.

The Counselor

Counselors are “people” people. Perhaps the best way to describe counselors is to compare them to technicians. If you were to break down and start crying while meeting with a technician, he or she would hand you a box of Kleenex. A Counselor is more likely to respond to your emotional outburst by giving you a hug.

Counselors are not afraid to engage with their clients on both an intellectual and emotional level. That's why during your initial consultation with a Counselor, when he or she asks, “How are you doing today?” they will listen to what you have to say. A Counselor is interested in more than just the facts of your case. They want to hear your story. In a divorce case, for example, they will want to know more than what happened to cause the marriage to break down. They may ask about how you met your spouse. They will want to know more than just your kids' names and birthdates. They will ask about their hobbies and how they are coping with the pending divorce.

Counselors offer their clients more than just legal advice. They will also offer words of encouragement and assurance as you move throughout the process. I am definitely a Counselor. I practice primarily in the area of family law, which means I help people who are faced with the challenge of getting custody of their kids or trying to get spousal support from a man who just

quit his job and moved in with someone young enough to be his daughter.

Not surprisingly, and more often than not, by the time a client arrives at my office, he or she is emotionally spent and sometimes scared to death about whether they will be able to handle what lies ahead for them. I consider it part of my job to help my clients feel better. That's why I am always reminding them that they have what it takes to do what needs to be done. And although I am a straight shooter when it comes to what I think the ultimate outcome of their case will be, I encourage my clients to maintain a positive perspective of their circumstances.

There is something else that I think distinguishes counselors from technicians. Counselors are more likely to go beyond simply advising you regarding what your rights are in a particular situation. You should not be surprised if he or she takes it a step further and offers insight about doing what's right. Let's say you hired a technician to prepare your last will and testament. If you tell the technician that you have two children but plan to leave everything you own to only one of them he or she will more than likely prepare the will per your instructions, no questions asked.

A Counselor, on the other hand, will also prepare the will but not without first inquiring about your motives. He or she will ask you to consider the long-term adverse emotional impact your decision will have on the child who receives nothing and may explore other things you can do to achieve your desired objective in a way that will be less hurtful to that child.

Do you think an attorney's job is to just do what you direct them to do? Or should an attorney help you see the broader implications of what you direct them to do? If you have never thought about these questions you should take time to do so. Although there is no right or wrong answer to either question, your response will speak volumes about what type of attorney is right for you.

If the thought of working with a Counselor appeals to you, then I have good news. A good Counselor will not be hard to find: the legal profession is filled with them. But that is not all, there is more good news. Counselors are well suited to handle *any* type of case, including the type of cases that I said Technicians were good at handling.

Personally, I think Counselors are best suited for cases involving family matters. I am pretty sure the fact that I am a Counselor who specializes in family law has birthed this opinion, but after over twenty-five years of practicing law I am convinced that when someone's family is in crisis they will only benefit from having an attorney who approaches the practice of law the way Counselors do.

The Attack Dog

Are you turned off by both the Technician's and Counselor's approach to the practice of law? Do neither of them sound like the kind of lawyer you are looking for? Then maybe this third type of attorney may appeal to you. I usually refer to them—both in print and in person—as Attack Dogs. Why? Because they are locked, loaded and paid to pounce. Attack Dogs have no interest in compromise and negotiation. And there is a good chance the words “fairness” and “reasonable” may have been deliberately redacted from their personal dictionaries.

An Attack Dog's objective, whether stated or unstated, is not just to win your case but to destroy the opposition in the process. If you just found out your husband of thirty years has been cheating on you for twenty-nine of those years with the woman you thought was your best friend, or your business partner has been funneling the money that was supposed to be used to pay your Federal taxes into an offshore account that you didn't know existed until the IRS showed up at your door, then you may feel like an Attack Dog is just what the doctor ordered for your case. Because let's face it: In these instances you may want to do more than just divorce your spouse or dissolve your business; you may not be satisfied until the opposing party has been ripped into a million little pieces.

Let me be clear, however: while I strongly believe that you should not hire an Attack Dog to represent you in a child custody case, there are certain legal fights where I feel you would be remiss *not* to show up without this type of attorney. You can trust and believe that if I were embroiled in a personal injury case against an insurance company or large corporation, or if I killed someone or was accused of killing someone, I would want an Attack Dog fighting on my behalf. Why? Because you can bet your car payment that will be the kind of attorney you will be

going against.

While all good lawyers are zealous in the representation of their client's interest, you should know Attack Dogs can be unabashedly—and sometimes indiscriminately—obstinate, ruthless and aggressive. So, what's the problem? Perhaps nothing as long you make sure you never find yourself in his or her crosshairs. How do you think he or she is going to react if you fail to do what he or she tells you to do or if you fail to make timely payments on your outstanding retainer fee? I can't say for sure, but you should not be surprised if he or she unleashes the same "leave no flesh behind" approach to dealing with you.

What type of lawyer would I be?

Can you save yourself some time and trouble by asking yourself this question and then going out and hiring an attorney that is like you? In other words, if you self-identify as an Attack Dog then does it make sense to hire one? In a perfect world, the answer would be yes. But, since our world is far from perfect, the answer is that it depends.

In some instances, it is a good idea for birds of a feather to flock together, but in many other situations opposites attract. You should let your experience be your guide. If you tend to get along well with people who have a personality similar to your personality, then by all means take that under consideration. But if you are constantly butting heads with people who don't act like you do, then this is not something you should ignore when hiring an attorney.

It may be more helpful to look closely at the other professional relationships in your life that work well. There is a really good chance that you will find that the same personality traits that have endeared you to your favorite doctor will be equally appealing in the attorney that's right for you.

Chapter Four: The Less Significant Seven

Have you ever wondered why it is that your car battery has outlasted many celebrity marriages? You don't have to be the million-dollar matchmaker to know that all that glitters is not gold. A custom Vera Wang gown and a fleet of Maybach limousines will not change the fact that relationships based primarily on mutual physical attraction are doomed from the start.

This advice is usually applied to dating relationships: Physical beauty is superficial. An attractive exterior is no indication of a person's interior or character. But it also applies equally well to your search for the attorney that's right for you: When making an important decision like who to hire to represent you, don't allow your judgment to be clouded by superficial considerations that offer little or no insight as to an attorney's true nature or ability.

Are you now wondering how you are going to avoid being influenced by superficial considerations, when you haven't dealt with lawyers enough to know what really matters and what doesn't? Here is the short list of things that matter most when selecting an attorney: character and competency. Attorneys need to not only be good at what they do; they also must be even better at keeping the promises and commitments they make to you when they take your money and accept you as a client.

What are some of the things that don't matter as much when deciding on what lawyer you should hire? I have compiled a list of what I call the "Less Significant Seven." These are things that you may have thought were really important considerations when selecting an attorney however they don't matter as much as you think.

1. **Alma Mater:** It is not about where you go, but what you know. Attorney Willie Gary is known as the "Giant Killer" for successfully taking on some of the country's biggest corporations on behalf of his clients. He has won some of the highest jury awards in the history

of the United States and is considered one of this country's top trial lawyers. However, Gary did not graduate from Harvard, Yale, Georgetown or any of the other top-tier law schools. He is a proud graduate of North Carolina Central University, a small historically black university in Durham, North

Carolina. Central is not one of the top law schools in the country; it is not even one of the top law schools in the state or city where it is located.

Without a doubt, Ivy League schools produce some of the best and brightest attorneys in the legal profession. But Willie Gary's career is just one of many examples that they don't produce *all* of the profession's superstars. The only reason some attorneys didn't attend an Ivy League school is because they could not afford the tuition. And the only reason some others did attend is because they (or their parents) could.

If you are having a tough time deciding between two evenly matched attorneys, it may make sense to use the ranking of their respective law school alma maters to break the tie. But if you use law-school ranking as the sole criteria for selecting an attorney, you may be setting yourself up for disappointment.

2. **Gender:** If I had listed the Less Significant Seven in order of least significance, gender would top the list. And yet many smart people make the dumb mistake of allowing gender to be the controlling factor in determining what lawyer he or she will hire. It is hard to believe in 2017 there are women who only want to hire female attorneys and men who insist on hiring only male members of the bar. Why does gender matter so much to these people?

I think it is because at some level they have bought into one or more of the following stereotypes: Women are the weaker sex. Men are naturally more aggressive than women. Women are more emotionally sensitive than men. Men are more likely to play fast and loose with the rules than women. Women are morally superior to men. Men are more ambitious than women. Women are less committed to their careers than men. Of course none of these things are true. In the county where I practice, the attorney with the most dubious reputation is a woman. And just recently a man who was considered a rising star in the district attorney's office resigned

his position in order to spend more time with his five-year-old son.

Stereotypes are creatures of preconceived notions, not reality. That's why if you want to find the lawyer that is right for you, your search should be gender neutral.

3. **Popularity:** Think back to your high school days. Who was the most popular person in your senior class? I would not be surprised if he or she were also the head cheerleader, homecoming king, prom queen or class president. However, I would be somewhat surprised to learn that he or she was also your class valedictorian. In case you were wondering, I was not popular in high school, and although I got good grades I was not the valedictorian. But you don't need to have achieved a perfect SAT score to know that the person in high school who knew everyone didn't necessarily also know how to maintain a 4.0 grade point average.

The attorneys in your area with the highest name recognition are not necessarily the best lawyers in town. This is particularly true if the only reason you know their names is because you see their faces plastered throughout town on billboards, park benches and on the side of transit buses. Or maybe their notoriety comes from the television ads that appear on your screen two or three times a day. It is a mistake to assume that just because an attorney is good at marketing he or she will also be good at handling your case.

It is quite possible the best lawyer in town may be the least-known lawyer in town. McDonald's is a brand that is known around the globe. They have sold over a billion burgers and counting, more than any other burger place on the planet. But I have no doubt that there are smaller, less well-known restaurants that sell fewer but better burgers.

4. **Google Search:** Here is my updated version of an old adage: you can't believe everything you hear and even less of what you read on Internet sites that rate and review attorneys. The problem I have with some of what you read online is that you can never really know who is actually posting the comments. This applies to both really good and really bad reviews.

A few months ago I read an article in *Inc.* magazine about a serial entrepreneur who started a

company that helped students prepare for standardized tests. The company was growing rapidly and making lots of money until a competing company began posting negative reviews and making false claims about them on the Internet. They successfully sued the company for defamation, but by the time the case got to court the damage had already been done.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident of this type of outrageous behavior. A bestselling author was caught posting negative reviews on Amazon.com about books by other authors who write in the same genre he does. But his dastardly deed didn't end there. He was also accused of posting positive reviews about his own books. Thanks to people like him, you can't allow online reviews to have the final say in whom you hire and whom you don't.

5. **Legal Fees:** Do you want to know a secret that every smart marketing person knows? Most consumers believe that price and quality are directly proportional, meaning the more you pay for something, the better it is. And guess what? Most successful attorneys are also smart marketers, or they have at least one smart marketing person on staff. They know clients will equate legal fees with legal expertise. But we have all had the unfortunate experience of paying more for something than it was really worth.

Here is the bottom line on legal fees: if your choice comes down to two lawyers, don't assume that the lawyer that charges the most is the best. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that you should hire the cheapest lawyer you can find. You just don't have to hire the most expensive. Of course there will probably be a big difference in quality between a lawyer that charges \$50 per hour and one that charges \$500 per hour. But there may be no quantifiable or measurable difference between a lawyer that charges \$200 per hour and one that charges \$500 per hour. The more expensive attorney may charge more because his or her client base is willing to pay more.

6. **Address:** Location, Location, Location: These may be the three crucibles of real estate but they don't apply to the practice of law. Every city has what I like to call "Attorney Alley." This is the street usually near the courthouse where there is a predominance of law offices. In most large cities it is the high office rent area because it is situated in the middle of downtown. I have been asked more than once whether it was important to hire an attorney whose office is located near the courthouse. "Not necessarily," is my best answer. Proximity to the courthouse may be

an indication of how active an attorney's practice is. But the fact that they are in the high dollar district doesn't necessarily mean they are a top-quality attorney.

7. Wins and Losses: The answer to "How many cases have you won?" may be very misleading. The Olympics is a good place to turn for an example why an attorney's win-loss record may reveal little about how good they are. Without a doubt Michael Jordan and Michael Phelps are two of our country's greatest Olympians. Michael Jordan won two gold medals, one at the 1984 games and the other at the 1992 games. Michael Phelps, on the other hand, has won a record-breaking 23 gold medals.

Does that mean Phelps is better at his sport than Jordan was at his? Few people, who know anything at all about basketball, would attempt to make this argument with a straight face and an alcohol blood level below the legal limit. That is not intended to minimize Phelps' achievements but he was able to compete in more than 25 events during his four Olympic appearances. Jordan only had the opportunity to compete in one event in 1984 and one event in 1992.

That's why an attorney may be able to honestly boast that they win all of their court cases. But if he or she only appears in court once every blue moon, then the fact that he or she is undefeated does not mean much. An attorney who may only win seventy-percent of his or her cases but appears in court on a daily basis is far more impressive.

Here is another important point to think about when comparing the relative win and loss records of two attorneys. The only way to accurately compare records is to make certain that both attorneys are handling the same type of cases. I know an attorney who likes to brag about her sterling win-loss record. She conveniently ignores the fact she works for a government agency that provides her the luxury of deciding which cases she will accept and which she will decline. As a result she only accepts the cases she knows she can win. Comparing her win-loss record to another attorney who routinely accepts more challenging cases would be unfair.

"Winning" is a relative term. It may mean one thing to you and another thing to the attorney. I know a personal injury attorney who boasts about winning most of his cases. Which is true. However, he keeps forty-percent of whatever money his clients are awarded plus expenses. In

some of his cases the client doesn't receive a dime after he won the case. Is that winning?

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, I would not advise you to hire an attorney who could too easily answer the question of how many cases he or she has won. Reason one: He or she is probably lying in order to get your business. Reason two: if he or she is keeping score of how many cases they have won, their focus is on themselves. Your case is not about them: it is about you.

Chapter Five: The Best and the First

You may not yet know the identity of the attorney you should hire. But there is a good chance someone you know will know who he or she is. That is why the absolute best way to find the lawyer that's right for you is to ask the people you know for referrals. The best and first people you should ask are your friends, family members, co-workers, and neighbors. Keep this in mind when considering whom to ask: the better the person knows you, the better able he or she will be to make a good referral.

Not every referral you receive will be a home run, but asking these follow-up questions will help make sure you are at least getting to first base.

Did you actually hire the attorney you are referring? Ideally you want a referral from someone who had first-hand experience dealing with the attorney. If they don't have first-hand experience working with the attorney then make sure you know the basis of their referral. If the attorney they are referring is just someone they Googled or saw in a television advertisement, then you should say "Thanks, but no thanks" for the referral.

What did the attorney do for you? You can't really compare apples and oranges. So although you don't need the person making the referral to share the gory details about the situation that required the assistance of an attorney, it would be helpful if he or she is willing to share enough about the case for you to gauge whether your cases are similar. A family law attorney who did a great job on a custody case may not be the right referral for someone looking for an attorney to handle a complex property settlement case.

What did you like most about the attorney? Remember, you are not looking for just any old attorney: you are looking for the attorney that's right for you. That's why if you get a lukewarm response to this question, then proceed with caution. However, if they respond

enthusiastically with a laundry list of things they like about the attorney they are referring and assuming what they like are the kinds of things you are looking for in attorney, then you may not just have gotten on base; you may be on your way to scoring a run.

What did you like least about the attorney? Nobody is perfect. If the referrer is willing to share a flaw then there is a good chance that you're getting an honest assessment. What bothered him or her may not bother you but knowing this will allow you to better assess the value of the referrals.

Have you referred other people to the attorney? If they say no, then ask why. The reason may be easy to explain. There is a good chance they simply have not had the opportunity to do so. And if this is the case, then fine. However, if there are other reasons you need to know what they are before you proceed with following up on the referral.

If they have referred the attorney to other people, ask these two questions:

What type of feedback have you gotten? Unless you sought the referral from someone who is out to get you, I am going to assume they are not going to share horror stories about the attorney they referred to you. So, it is likely to they will respond by saying they have not received any feedback or only positive feedback. But this is a case where no news is bad news. If they say they have not received any feedback then that may mean the lawyer they are referring you to is okay but nothing special. How do I know? Because if the lawyer swept the person they referred off their feet, there is a really good chance they would have called the person to thank them for the referral.

How did the attorney show his or her appreciation for the referral? There is a reason I posed this question in a way that assumes the attorney did something to show appreciation. Clients are the only meaningful difference between a lawyer who practices law for a living and a lawyer who doesn't practice law for a living. That's why I thank everyone who is

kind enough to refer a new client to me. I either pick up the phone and give them a call or send a hand-written thank-you note. And I have even taken a group of clients who regularly send me referrals out to dinner. I would not necessarily take an attorney who failed to say thank you off my list of possible candidates, but I would move someone who did take the time to show his or her gratitude to top of the list.

Other Good Sources of Referrals:

Professional Contacts: Your search for referrals should begin with your family and friends but it should not end with them. Other professionals and business owners with whom you regularly do business may also be excellent sources of referrals. Let your physician, accountant, dentist, financial planner and kid's pediatrician know you are looking to hire an attorney, and ask if there is anyone he or she would recommend. If you are happy with the standard of service he or she provides, then there is a good chance that is the same yardstick he or she will use to measure other professionals. And because they value your relationship they will be careful not to refer someone unless he or she believes the attorney will do a good job for you.

Your Beautician and Barber: One day I traced the source of most of my clients and it turned out that my beautician, who over the years also became a good friend, had referred almost twenty percent of my client base. I am not sure what it is about the shampoo bowl or barber chair that causes people to open up about their marital problems, but they do, and that's why my beautician was routinely referring clients to me. If your beautician and barber is anything like mine, he or she comes into close contact with a lot of people throughout the day, there is a good chance he or she will either know a lawyer or they will know someone who knows a lawyer you could call.

Courtroom Personnel: There is no one better qualified to offer an opinion or recommend an attorney than courtroom personnel like the bailiff and clerk. This is particularly true if you are

looking for a family law attorney. The courtroom bailiff and clerk spend eight hours a day, five days a week inside the courtroom watching attorneys in action.

He or she knows the good, the bad, and the ugly. The courtroom bailiff and clerk will know which attorneys show up to court on time and which don't. He or she will know which attorneys show up prepared to try cases and which attorneys routinely ask that their cases be continued or rescheduled. And he or she will know which attorneys seem to get along well with the judges and which ones seem to always be butting heads with other lawyers.

If you don't already know someone who works in the courtroom, then you will need to make a trip to the courthouse in the county where your case is going to be heard. Go to the Clerk of Court's office and ask if someone can point you in the direction of the courtroom where they hear the type of case you have. Go to the courtroom and sit quietly in the back, and when there is a recess, approach the bailiff and tell him or her you are looking to hire an attorney. If they don't give you a name, ask the clerk the same question.

If your first trip to the courthouse fails to produce a referral, then keep trying. Try another courtroom or come back on another day. Courtroom personnel are constantly being rotated in and out of different courtrooms. A different day could mean a different bailiff and clerk, which can produce a different result.

Chapter Six: The Ugly Frog

Eat the ugly frog first: that's what time management guru Brian Tracy advises people to do when prioritizing their daily tasks. He believed that tackling the toughest task first frees up the energy needed to do everything else on your list. I would give you the same advice but for a different reason. Asking the toughest questions first during your initial consultation with an attorney will allow you to quickly get the information you need to assess whether he or she is right for you.

How do I define a tough question? Most lawyers already have well-rehearsed responses to questions about their education and experience. Any attorney worth the price of a legal pad can spin his or her credentials in such a way that you may leave his or her office believing he or she is a lock for the next opening on the Supreme Court of the United States. A tough question is one that the attorney is not routinely asked and that they are not likely to have a prepackaged response ready to toss your way. These questions are more likely to elicit the type of authentic responses, which can provide invaluable insight on how he or she may handle your case.

Nine Tough Questions Clients Never Ask ... But Should

Here is a list of questions an attorney will not expect you to ask. Do you need to ask all of them? My best advice is to proceed as the path unfolds. Review the list and then rank the questions in the order of relative importance to you. After the attorney responds to the first two or three questions, you can then decide to proceed with the other questions or you might feel you have enough information to make a decision about whether the attorney is right for you.

1. Have you ever declined to represent someone seeking your services?

What would you think of a woman who said "yes" to every man who asked her out on a date? I think it would be fair to describe her as desperate. That is why "yes" is the only right answer to this question. It means the lawyer has standards and that he or she knows he or she can't help everyone who walks in the door. It also means he or she is not so desperate for money that some dollars can't walk out the door.

What are some good reasons why an attorney might decline to represent certain clients? There are as many good reasons as there are good attorneys. Here are few examples of the type of clients I routinely refuse to represent:

Clients who have already hired and fired several attorneys. I will not represent a client who has hired and fired more than two lawyers before contacting me. A client who has hired and fired more than two lawyers may project the ill will they feel toward their previous lawyers onto me. Maybe I am wrong, but I am not willing to find out.

Clients who express their belief that all lawyers are crooks. Occasionally at the end of a workshop, instead of asking a question, someone will raise their hand and when I call on them they proceed to bash attorneys and express how much they love to hate lawyers. This happens so often that I am no longer surprised when it does. However, I am still floored when these same people will ask me to represent them. I always, always respectfully decline. There is no way I am going to agree to represent someone who openly and passionately hates lawyers. Is it because I am thin skinned? No, it is because these people are almost impossible to satisfy.

Clients who express a willingness to lie. In North Carolina, you have to be separated from your spouse for one year before you can file for divorce. Not a week goes by when I don't get a call from someone who says, "My spouse and I have been separated for less than a year but we are willing to say it has been a year so we can get a divorce right away." How do I respond to these clients? I simply say, "I wish you well but I can't help you." And I usually give them this free advice: Anyone who will conspire with you will also conspire against you.

Clients who complain about legal fees. Legal crises are often unexpected, and most people don't have a few thousand dollars lying around to pay an attorney. So I completely understand the challenge clients sometimes face in paying my

retainer. I make it clear if they feel my fee is too high they have the option of seeking assistance elsewhere. In fact, I encourage them to shop around. However complaining about the fee is not an option because it is as an indication that they do not see the value in the service I provide. If clients don't see the value in what their attorney is doing for them, then no matter what happens, they are not going to be happy with their services.

2. If you were in my situation, and I could not hire you, whom would you hire instead? This question will probably catch the attorney by surprise. That is why their response can be very revealing. An attorney who refuses to provide a name may be afraid to do so because he or she is worried you will leave the office and hire that person instead. You want an attorney who cares about you. If he or she really cares, it won't matter who helps you. And if they are really confident in their ability, they won't be afraid of the competition.

3. What is the most important question a client should ask before hiring an attorney? This question will give you some insight into what the attorney thinks is important and you can then assess whether what is important to him or her is also important to you. If the attorney responds by saying "What happens if I don't pay the bill in a timely manner?" then this may be an indication that money is what the attorney really cares about. Contrast that response with an attorney that considers this to be the most important question a client should ask before hiring an attorney: "What can I do to ensure that I get the outcome I seek?"

4. Have you ever had to sue a client? If they say yes, that doesn't mean you should run out the door. Ask them to explain, and if they can't offer a satisfactory explanation then you should head for the hills. I have been practicing law for over twenty-five years. I have had several clients that failed to pay their agreed-upon fee. However, I have never sued a client to collect my fee. My motto is "If they can live with the money they owe me, I can live without it." There is nothing wrong with a attorney suing a client, but there is nothing right with it either.

5. What is the difference between you and every other attorney in town?

This is not an invitation for the attorney to bad-mouth his or her colleagues. It gives them an opportunity to put their best foot forward. This is how I would respond to this question: I consider myself to be more than just an attorney; I am an “encourager at law.” I pride myself on being the most positive and encouraging attorney not just in the county where I practice, but on the planet.

6. How would you describe your ideal client? Give the attorney a second to formulate his or her response to this question and make sure you listen carefully to what he or she has to say. You have to be willing to honestly assess whether you fit their description. If the attorney says his or her ideal client “sits back and lets me handle everything,” and you know your personality is such that you like to micromanage every aspect of your life, then think twice before retaining this attorney.

7. What would one of your disgruntled clients say about you? This is how I would respond to this question: I had a client who had three young children. She and her husband were separated. On one occasion after a visit with their father one of the kids didn’t want to return to her home. She told me she told her seven-year old son that after everything she does for him he should be ashamed of himself for crying and hurting her feelings. I told her that she should be ashamed of herself for chastising a little kid who is forced to choose between his parents. She did not respond to my comment. But, a few days later she said she no longer wished me to represent her. I still feel bad about hurting her feelings, but I don’t regret telling her the truth.

8. What is the biggest mistake clients make when dealing with their attorney? I think a good attorney will appreciate this question. It will also put him or her on notice that you are a thoughtful client. Not every attorney wants a thoughtful client, but only thoughtful attorneys will appreciate this quality in his or her clients.

9. Do you love what you do? Love is a powerful force; it moves mountains. That’s why

you want an attorney who responds with a resounding YES to this question. Attorneys who love what they do put in the hours needed to do it well. That's why attorneys who love what they do are in the practice of making things happen. Lawyers who don't love what they do make a lot of excuses for why they didn't do what they said they were going to do for you.

Nine More Questions

In addition to the questions above, you should arrive at your initial consultation with a list of any other questions you have. Here is a list of the type of good questions that I am routinely asked:

1. Who is going to actually be working on my case?
2. What do I do if I am unhappy with your services?
3. What can I do to save money?
4. Is the fee negotiable?
5. Is a flat fee an option?
6. How often can I expect to hear from you?
7. What is the worst-case scenario?
8. Are you willing to put your promises in writing?
9. How long will it take to get the relief I seek?

Chapter Seven: The Last Attorney on Earth

You don't owe me anything but I would appreciate it if you would do me a favor: Before you sign the retainer agreement, write a check or hire an attorney, remind yourself that the person you are considering hiring is not the last attorney on earth. It is important to realize at the time you make a decision that you have a choice, that there are other options and that your decision is not being fueled by desperation. How do you know if this shoe would fit your foot? You may be acting out of desperation if against your better judgment you are considering hiring one of the following attorneys:

An Attorney Who Is Distracted: The attorney that's right for you will make you feel like you are the only client he or she has. And he or she will do this by giving you his or her undivided attention whenever you are meeting or speaking with him or her. If he or she is unable to convince you of this during your initial consultation when most attorneys will be putting his or her best foot forward, it is highly unlikely that he or she will become more focused with time.

Here are some signs that the attorney is distracted and "just not that into you":

1. He does most of the talking during the initial interview.
2. She interrupts you while you are talking.
3. He doesn't appear to be listening to you.
4. She doesn't answer your questions.
5. He keeps looking at his watch.
6. She keeps using her cell phone.
7. He doesn't ask you questions that you expect to be asked.
8. She appears to be in a hurry.
9. He didn't meet at your appointed time.
10. She doesn't seem to know what she is talking about.

An Attorney You Don't Like: After twenty years in the practice, I am still blown away by the number of people who come into my office seeking help in getting a divorce who tell me that they knew when they were standing at the altar they should not have gotten married. Why do so many people do this? I think it is because they want to believe that the thing they don't like about their fiancé will go away once they say "I do." Unfortunately, the opposite is more likely to happen. What you don't like about your boyfriend or girlfriend gets worse once they become your husband or wife. If you are sitting across from an attorney and there is a voice in your head telling you that it is not a good idea to hire him or her because there is something about them that rubs you the wrong way, listen to it. It does not matter what the attorney has going for them, it makes no sense to retain someone you don't like. There is a good chance you will like them less with time, not more.

More Attorney Than You Need: When O.J. Simpson was charged with murder, he hired the dream team of attorneys that included the late Johnny Cochran and Barry Sweitzer among other legal heavy weights. O.J. needed the dream team for several reasons. First, he was a black man accused of killing his white wife. And the husband is always the first person to whom the police look, and unfortunately, it's often the case that when it is a black husband it is the last place they look. Second, the prosecution had a truckload of evidence against O.J. And last, but certainly not least, there is a high probability that he committed the crime. The legal dream team was the only thing that stood between O.J. and life in prison.

If the challenge you face is as daunting as the one O.J. confronted then it makes perfect sense for you to hire the best attorney or attorneys your money can buy. Only a reckless fool would do otherwise. However, unless you have deep pockets, it does not make sense to hire a member of the dream team to handle your simple uncontested divorce. Hiring more attorney than you need and can comfortably afford is a decision you will soon regret.

An Attorney Who Bad-mouths Other Attorneys: There are not enough hours in the day for me to list the reasons why I don't like a woman who I shall refer to as "Attorney X. Let me just say she embodies every negative stereotype that plagues our profession. But beyond that she is bitter, rude and extremely hard to deal with. I would not trust her any further than I could

pick her up and throw her. That's why a few years ago I stopped accepting cases in which she was the opposing counsel. I believe peace is a pearl of a great price and she gets on my last nerve.

But here's the thing I dislike most about her: she is constantly bad-mouthing other attorneys. And surprise, surprise, every negative thing I have heard her say about another attorney is also true about her. Although I have been tempted to do so I have never said an unkind word about her to any of our colleagues. The reason you should not hire an attorney who bad-mouths other attorneys is the same reason I never bad-mouthed her. It is impossible to sling mud without getting muddy. And only pigs like playing in dirt and mud.

An Attorney Who Can Only Speak Legalese: You don't need an attorney who does not, cannot or will not speak "plain" English or the same language you speak. If you had a law degree, you would not need to hire an attorney to represent you. That is why your lawyer needs to be able to explain your case so you can understand what the relevant law is and how the law applies to the facts of your case. Your lawyer also needs to explain his or her legal strategy in way that makes sense to you. If your attorney can't help you understand their strategy, how will they be able to make a judge or jury understand?

Why would an attorney resist speaking your language? Lots of reasons, and none of them are acceptable. Arrogance tops the list. Some lawyers believe that they are smarter than people (and that includes their clients) who do not have law degrees. You do not need an attorney who questions your intelligence. If you don't understand what your lawyer is saying it is not your fault. It is your attorney's job to make himself or herself understood.

Your attorney needs to speak your language, because communication is the key to any successful relationship. The attorney client relationship is no exception. In fact, according to a report by the American Bar Association, the majority of disputes between attorney and clients are the result of poor communication. You can't communicate with someone you don't understand. And you are far less likely to ask the questions you need to stay on top of your case if you don't feel your attorney will respond in a way that is helpful. Since asking questions is the only way to ensure

your attorney is doing what he or she promised he or she would do when you hired them, make sure you hire someone that speaks your language.

Chapter Eight: Are You a Chicken or a Pig?

In the previous chapters I have told you everything I know about finding the attorney that is right for you. But that was only half the battle. In this chapter, I want to share some advice on how to ensure that once you find the right attorney you are able to maintain a professional, positive and productive working relationship.

Avoid Committing Too Soon. That is my first and maybe best piece of advice. If at all possible try to interview at least two lawyers before making your final decision. Of course, if you have an emergency legal situation that requires immediate attention, this may not be practical or possible. But if time is not of the essence, then I encourage you to meet with more than one attorney. What's the point in meeting with another lawyer if you already know the first lawyer you met with is right for you? You can't really know that for sure unless you have another attorney to compare him or her to.

Twenty- five years ago when my husband and I were house hunting I felt deeply and blindly in love with the first house the realtor showed us. My husband was smart not to allow himself to be so easily impressed. (I have never admitted this to him). He rightfully insisted that we look at a few other homes before putting down a deposit on what I considered to be our dream home. After the realtor showed us a few houses, I quickly realized that the first house we looked at was completely wrong for us. The mistake I made was to compare the first house the realtor showed us to the small apartment we were living in at the time. The house looked great when compared to our apartment but it could not stack up against all the other houses that were on the market.

How will you know how the attorney you want to hire stacks up against other attorneys if you have no one to compare him or her to? On the day you hire an attorney you may not care about anything other than what he or she has promised to do to help you. But there is no more

miserable place on earth than the intersection of doubt and regret. And that is where you may find yourself if you hire the first and only attorney you consult.

Meeting with more than one attorney before you make your final decision will bolster your confidence in the attorney you ultimately decide to hire. That is important because months or maybe even a year or so later when your case appears to have stalled or it takes a few unpleasant and unexpected twists and turns your attorney failed to predict, you won't waste time and energy second-guessing your decision by questioning whether or not you hired the right person.

Successful relationships require tons of commitment. That's why you must do your due diligence before hiring an attorney, because once you retain someone to represent you, you have to be committed to doing everything your attorney advises you to do. Assuming you hired the right attorney, the success of your attorney-client relationship will be directly proportional to your level of commitment.

It will not be enough for you to be involved in your case; you must be totally committed. What's the difference between being involved and committed? I will answer that question with a popular riddle: In a bacon and egg breakfast, what's the difference between the chicken and the pig? The chicken is involved and the pig is committed. This may be one of the few instances in which being referred to as a "pig" is a good thing.

Your Lawyer Can't Read Your Mind. Once you commit to an attorney, it is your responsibility to let him or her know what you expect to gain by hiring him or her and what is required to keep you happy. Assuming he or she knows what you expect is a big mistake. Waiting for your attorney to ask about your expectations is an even bigger mistake. When should you do this? As early in the relationship as possible and as often as necessary.

If you expect your attorney to provide you with weekly updates, you might say this: "I would appreciate it if you would email me at the end of each week with an update on the status of my case." Or, if you expect your attorney to be prompt in returning your calls, you could say something like, "I will *only* call when I have something important to ask. That's why I would

appreciate it if you would return my calls within 24 hours of leaving a message.” And, if you expect your attorney to work on your case as opposed to a paralegal, then you should let him or her know by saying: “Since I made my check out to you, I expect that you will be the person working on my case and not someone who works for you.”

What you say is important. But it is not nearly as important as *how* you state your expectations. Clients sometimes hesitate to be assertive because they do not want to appear to be bossy or demanding. If you feel this way, do whatever you need to do to get over it. Because you absolutely, positively need to—and should—be clear and decisive when stating your expectations so there is no room for confusion. If you beat around the bush or are too subtle there is a chance your attorney will not pick up on what you are trying to say. And it is really not fair to blame an attorney for not meeting an unstated expectation. In a previous section I told you that it is your attorney’s job to make himself or herself understood. Well, the reverse is also true. It is your responsibility to make yourself understood.

What if your lawyer does not seem receptive to a conversation about expectations? If the attorney says anything that remotely sounds like he or she is suggesting either directly or indirectly that your expectations are not his or her problem, then you need to take immediate steps to end the relationship. If possible stop payment on their check, tear up the retainer agreement and hire another attorney. An attorney who responds this way may have appeared to be right for you but their response should be a clear indication that they are not. The sooner you cut your losses the better. Jerks get better with time: they get better at being jerks.

While there is never a legitimate excuse for an attorney to behave badly toward a client, there may be another plausible explanation for an attorney’s resistance to addressing a client’s expectations. It is because the client’s expectations are not reasonable. It is not reasonable to expect your attorney to be a miracle worker. It is reasonable to expect your attorney to promptly return your calls. However it is not reasonable to expect him or her to return your call within two hours of you leaving a message with his or her receptionist. It is reasonable to expect your attorney to work hard to resolve your case as soon as possible. But you have to keep in mind that there are thousands of other people in your county who have also hired attorneys to work hard to

have their cases resolved as soon as possible. Everyone can't have their case heard first. Lots of people are going to have to get in line and lots more people are going to have to move to the back of the line.

What if you don't have any definite expectations? I wish all of my life's questions were this easy to answer. Before hiring an attorney log-on to EXPECTATIONS.com and download a bundle of them—kidding! If you don't have expectations, you don't have expectations. I am certainly not encouraging you to make a big deal out of something that does not matter to you. The only people that need to heed my advice regarding the importance of making their expectations clear to the attorney before hiring him or her are people who have clear expectations.

Chapter Nine: Advice in Action

At the conclusion of criminal trials, the prosecutor and defense attorney have an opportunity to make a closing argument. It is their final shot at swaying the jury by restating the key evidence that supports their theory of the case. A powerful closing argument can mean the difference between an acquittal and a conviction and in capital murder cases that could mean the difference between life and death.

This final chapter is my closing argument, my last chance to make sure I have told you everything you need to know to find the attorney that's right for you. Although I am not burdened with the task of convincing a jury that my client should not have to walk the green mile, I still feel the pressure to do my best for you. That's why before beginning this chapter, I thought long and hard about what more I could say that would make the difference between you finding a lawyer and finding the right lawyer. I also went back and reread what I had written in the previous chapters.

So, what else do I have to say on the subject?

Nothing. I feel good knowing that I have told you everything I have learned after spending more than twenty-five years in the practice. But that doesn't mean there is nothing left for you to do. You have to apply the information in the book. That's why I created the following "Advice In Action Checklist". It is designed to help shorten the distance between looking for a lawyer and hiring a lawyer that's right for you.

ADVICE in ACTION CHECKLIST

Ask your friends, family members, co-workers and neighbors if they know an attorney they would refer to you.

Ask the person making the referral these follow-up questions:

Did you actually hire the attorney you are referring?

What did the attorney do for you?

What did you like most about the attorney?

What did you like least about the attorney?

Have you referred other people to the attorney?

If they have referred the attorney to other people, follow up with these questions:

What type of feedback have you gotten?

How did the attorney show his or her appreciation for the referral?

Pursue other good sources of referrals:

Professional contacts like your physician, accountant, dentist, financial planner

Your beautician or barber

Courtroom personnel

Prior to meeting with an attorney, review the following tough questions and rank them in order of relative importance to you:

Have you ever declined to represent someone seeking your services?

If you were in my situation, and I could not hire you, whom would you hire instead?

What is the most important question a client should ask before hiring an attorney?

Have you ever had to sue a client?

What is the difference between you and every other attorney in town?

How would you describe your ideal client?

What would one of your disgruntled clients say about you?

What is the biggest mistake clients make when dealing with an attorney?

Do you love what you do?

Make a list of any other questions you would like the attorney to answer.

Examples might include:

Who is going to be actually working on my case?

What do I do if I am unhappy with your services?

What can I do to save money?

Is the fee negotiable?

How often can I expect to hear from you?

What is the worst-case scenario?

Are you willing to put your promises about the outcome of my case into writing?

How long will it take to get the relief I seek?

At the initial consultation make certain to ask the tough questions first.

Before retaining an attorney, ask yourself these questions:

Were you satisfied with his or her answers to your questions?

Did he or she appear distracted?

Is he or she more attorney than you need?

Did he or she bad-mouth other attorneys?

Did he or she speak your language

Did you meet with more than one attorney? (If not, have you considered the benefits of doing so?)

Once you retain an attorney be prepared to totally commit to doing what your attorney advises you to do and to let him or her know in no uncertain terms what you expect from him or her.

About the Author

Jackie Stanley, a graduate of Wake Forest University Law School, is a divorce lawyer with over 20 years of experience. She is also a writer whose books have been featured in *Essence Magazine* and *Psychology Today*.

Jackie's clients routinely refer to her as both their attorney and "encourager" at law. Why? Because her divorce law practice goes beyond just legal advice and representation in court. She is also committed to giving women the support and encouragement they need to move beyond their broken relationships and on with their lives.

One way she expresses this commitment is by conducting free legal self-help workshops called, *Breaking Up and Moving On!* at the Women's Resource Center in Greensboro, North Carolina. Her workshop is one of their most popular and highest rated programs. "Inspiring and Entertaining" is how one participant described Jackie.

The success of the *Breaking Up and Moving On!* workshops ignited Jackie's desire to do even more to reach a broader audience and to help as many more women as possible.

Jackie would love to hear what you think about this book as well as suggestions on other topics you think should address in future books.

Here's how you can connect with Jackie:

Twitter: @attorneyjackie

Email: attorneyjackie@jackiestanley.com

Web: JackieStanley.com

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