

8 Ways to Find a Great Business Lawyer

A good lawyer can often mean the difference between ‘getting a deal up’ or having it flounder on the rocks.

After you’ve spent months putting a deal together, you have a reasonable expectation that the lawyer you refer the job to won’t ‘kill the deal’ through inaction or incompetence.

If you want to find a good lawyer who will look after your deals, then these are the attributes you should be looking for:

1. Responsiveness

Good lawyers will make themselves available to you. You should not have to beg them to talk with you and respond to your enquiries.

A good lawyer should respond promptly to phone calls and emails having regard to the priority of a matter, and the projected timeframes of a transaction.

However, keep in mind that good lawyers also tend to be busy and are usually juggling a number of transactions and competing priorities.

2. Pro-active and Collaborative

A good lawyer should be pro-active in the way that they manage a transaction. Too often it is the broker – rather than the lawyer – who is trying to ‘push things along’.

This means that a lawyer should be getting in front of issues, should be persistent, and work collaboratively with you to get the deal done.

Like any other service provider, a lawyer should make your job easier – not harder. If they’re not, then find someone else.

3. Communicates

If a lawyer is to be effective, then they need to be able to communicate with you and the client.

This means that they need to be good listeners, have the capacity to distil vast amounts of information, and the ability to communicate that information *effectively*.

You should expect for any lawyer to keep you informed as to the progress of your deals, and have the capacity to communicate legal issues simply and precisely.

If the relationship is working properly, information, knowledge and skills should be shared – you should each be learning from each other. This is a collaborative game.

4. Judgement

The ability to draw reasonable, logical conclusions or assumptions from (sometimes) limited information is an essential attribute of a lawyer.

A good business lawyer will also be able to judge what legal issues are important in a particular transaction.

An average lawyer will become pre-occupied with irrelevant or peripheral issues. As such, it's important to identify someone who quickly gets to the 'heart of a deal' and is commercial.

With that said, keep in mind that a lawyer's paramount duty is always to the court, the client and the administration of justice. This will, at times, conflict with commercial objectives.

5. Creative

The very best lawyers are not only analytical, but they display a great deal of creativity in their problem solving.

In short, a good lawyer should be able to problem solve and come up with creative solutions, rather than just identify problems or issues.

6. Respect and Humility

A good lawyer should demonstrate courtesy and respect in the work that they do and the way they communicate with you and clients.

If you find a lawyer difficult or arrogant, there's a fair chance your clients will as well. Find someone who is confident and skilful, but demonstrates respect for your skills and expertise.

7. Expertise

A good business lawyer should have a broad range of legal knowledge and skills. They should also be networked in with a range of other professionals and specialist lawyers.

The sheer variety of issues associated with business sales means that a lawyer needs to be across areas like contract law, property and leasing law, franchising, intellectual property, employment law and tax.

There are lots of good lawyers out there (and, yes, some pretty average one's too). However, you need to choose your lawyer carefully having regard to your deal and your client (different horses for different courses).

All lawyers have different skill sets and expertise. For that reason, look for lawyers who specialise in business transactions. A great litigation lawyer does not necessarily maketh a great transactional lawyer – and vice versa.

8. Rapport

Finally, find someone you like working with. Is this someone I can get along with? Do I trust this person? Are they professional? Are they going to look after my clients and my deals? This is important.

In short, whilst it's not necessary to be 'best buddies', a degree of friendliness and respect is essential to building an on-going relationship of trust.

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