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## **SELECTING A LAW OFFICE**

### **Decisions in selecting an office location:**

1. The nature of the practice --
  - a) criminal law or family law practice may not need a fancy office; home or cheap office may be suitable;
  - b) personal injury law practice may want to be located as a storefront in a low income neighborhood; and
  - c) corporate practice may want to be located in a downtown area.
2. Proximity to public transportation and/or parking.
3. Proximity to courts or agencies --
  - a) trial or litigation attorneys may want to be located near the courthouses;
  - b) Worker's Compensation, Social Security/Disability, or other administrative law attorneys may want to be located near the hearing offices;
  - c) transactional attorneys, such as real estate attorneys, may want to be located near their clients (the lenders), or in the neighborhoods where the transactions relate.
4. Special concerns --
  - a) some attorneys want to be located in a "legal community" of lots of attorneys in the area;
  - b) attorneys with "special needs" clients, such as wheelchair-bound clients, may want to be located on a ground floor;
  - c) convenience to home may be needed;
  - d) "per diem" attorneys may only want a mail drop location.

### **Locating the desired office:**

1. Speak to other lawyers first -- many attorneys have available office space or know an attorney who does;
2. Check the local newspaper (print/website), Craigslist, internet, or New York Law Journal for professional office space;
3. Check at the local bar association/publications for advertisements;
4. Contact commercial real estate brokers;
5. If a particular area or building is desired, visit the managing agent or doorman to inquire about space.

### **Types of office situations:**

1. "Space for services" --
  - a) common for new attorneys -- new attorney agrees to work a certain number of hours per month for attorney-landlord in exchange for an office;
  - b) can be a good way to curb huge outlay of office rent;
  - c) can be flexible -- once new attorney can afford to pay some rent, number of hours per month can be reduced or eventually eliminated;
  - d) can be detrimental to new attorney's practice, if attorney-landlord requires certain hours in the month which directly conflict or interfere with new attorney's own, private cases;
  - e) discuss potential time conflicts with attorney-landlord (such as when new attorney's private case is scheduled in court at the same time as attorney-landlord's case);
  - f) can be a good way to get business -- new attorney will be referred by attorney-landlord for cases he can't handle or doesn't have the time to handle;
  - g) can be used to "test the waters" as to geographic area or focus of practice, without a large investment in an office.
2. Law office suite --
  - a) good way to share expenses of an office;

b) allows for new attorney to impress clients with a large office, if needed for a certain image;

c) may include sharing of receptionist or secretary;

d) good for "bouncing ideas" off of the other attorneys -- it is hard to practice law in a vacuum, without input from other attorneys;

e) can be negative if several attorneys in the suite are competing for the same type of clients -- two personal injury attorneys, for example;

f) can be a good way to get overflow work from the other attorneys, such as court appearances or research projects, because of the close proximity to the attorney and the files;

g) ability to shift the burden and expense of updating law library, subscriptions, telephone and other utilities, copier, and other expenses or mundane duties to the office manager or primary attorney.

3. "Image" office --

a) good for minimizing office costs;

b) typically, pleasant-appearance -- maintained in such a way as to be suitable for any attorney in any area of practice;

c) negative if there is heavy usage by attorney -- every fax, copy, phone call, or other common expense is billed to the attorney. Attorney may find himself telling clients to limit faxes to the office, usage of conference room, or other limitation measures designed to keep costs down.

4. Private office --

a) good for attorneys who expect to have a thriving practice shortly;

b) attorney must be in charge of all aspects of running an office, including ordering office supplies, copier costs, etc.;

c) good for attorneys who do not like to worry about office being used by others, waiting for conference room availability, or having others around at night, etc.;

d) typically more expensive to maintain;

e) office can be designed according to the attorney's tastes.

### **Negotiating the office lease:**

1. Term of lease --
  - a) short term may be desired, such as month-to-month;
  - b) option to renew lease may be important.
  
2. Services included in lease --
  - a) the office building may provide cleaning services;
  - b) electric or air-conditioning may be separate charges;
  - c) use of staff or equipment may be included;
  - d) furnished office might be provided, or use of internet on the office network instead of separate account.

## **Checklist for law office:**

The following is a list of various issues/concerns, which may be important to the attorney entering into a law suite, either in a sharing arrangement with other attorneys or in a private office. This list is certainly not exhaustive, but is offered to highlight the general concerns of an attorney seeking space:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Actual law office:   | 4. Signage:  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Size of office                       | <input type="checkbox"/> On door or wall of office/suite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> View from office                     | <input type="checkbox"/> In building directory - lobby   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Windows                              |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carpeting/wood floors                |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freshly painted                      |  |
| 2. Common areas:  | 5. Space/Building:                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conference room                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Air conditioning included       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law library                          | <input type="checkbox"/> 24 hour building, if needed     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photocopier/fax machine areas        | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean appearance                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> clerical service available           | <input type="checkbox"/> wired for all ISP providers     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> waiting room, with periodicals       | <input type="checkbox"/> secretarial space               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New York Law Journal subscription    | <input type="checkbox"/> file cabinets or storage area   |
| 3. Lease arrangements:  | 6. People:   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Month-to-month tenancy               | <input type="checkbox"/> Likable attorneys/staff         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written lease agreement for term     | <input type="checkbox"/> Receptionist to accept calls    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Security deposit, if needed          | <input type="checkbox"/> Good referral sources in suite  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Option to cancel lease               | <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful building staff          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal guaranty or corporate lease |  |