

Choosing the Best Lawyer for Your Small Business



Meaghan L. Schneider

Attorney At Law



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Welcome



If you are a business owner, Meaghan Schneider is the lawyer you might wish you had on staff. Meaghan is a solo practitioner in Chicago delivering customized legal solutions to her clients. She becomes a small part of each business she serves, facilitating the plans of inspired entrepreneurs. Meaghan's focus on the organization, operation, promotion, risk management and defense of a business allows that business to focus on what it does best.

Meaghan counsels growing small- and mid-sized companies, guides solopreneurs, and represents established business owners. She writes and reviews business plans, operating agreements, sales contracts, leases, and employment terms, among other papers, and has worked with clients on their marketing, licensing, and risk management issues.

Meaghan says, “ being a business owner can be a limitless outlet for personal and professional growth. Day to day, I work with smart, savvy, strong people who inspire me. The people I work with have heads teeming with genius ideas and heads brimming with enthusiasm for what they do. Their energy and excitement is absolutely stimulating and makes me even more passionate about making meaningful contributions to their businesses.”

Meaghan provides general counsel scaled to small businesses and also represents individuals with issues related to a variety of contracts, from real estate and construction contracts to employment and severance agreements.



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Choosing the Best Lawyer For Your Small Business



As a small business owner, you keep a running list of tasks you must undertake, from finding office space to creating a logo to hiring employees. As a small business owner, most of these responsibilities are yours alone. Small business owners do it all - without the multitude of employees that multimillion-dollar corporations have. Just as you carefully plan the day to day operation of your new

business, you need to proceed with caution when you create your small business, bringing your plan to life as a legal business entity. Give yourself and your new business a head start and seek sound legal advice. Making decisions without being informed of their legal consequences may prevent your business from thriving and, worse, may cause permanent damage to your business.

Your legal advisor should be experienced in a variety of business law matters, reasonably priced for your small business budget, and prepared to enter a long-term professional relationship with you and your business. Your attorney can be an important tool in building your small business, if you select her carefully with a few things in mind.

Your attorney should be an optimistic cynic. She will share your vision of future greatness and then ask you, “what if?” Plan ahead and have an attorney assist you from the very beginning; do not wait until you have been served with a lawsuit to scramble for legal help. At the start, an attorney can help you decide what type of entity your business should be—for example, by comparing the risks and benefits of a limited liability corporation versus a limited liability partnership. Your attorney will help you assess your risks and engage in contingency planning to keep your business safe no matter what the future brings. Carefully planning each business move may save a great deal of legal problems later should an issue arise.



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Research attorneys in your area.

Ask your fellow business owners whom they recommend, and contact your local state bar association to see if a list of business attorneys is available. Review these attorneys' websites, Facebook pages, LinkedIn profiles, and other information you find online. It is important that an attorney hired to protect the interests of your small business

creates and negotiates contracts, understands how to analyze various types of business entities, has the ability to negotiate commercial real estate leases, appreciates the tax consequences of various business decisions, and, either assists you with certain intellectual property concerns or has a close relationship with someone that is able to help you. Your attorney should also be experienced in business litigation in the event that your small business becomes involved in a lawsuit.

Your attorney does not need to charge you high fees for first-rate service. Think about your budget for legal expenses. Although it is necessary to allocate some amount of your startup budget to have an excellent attorney at your side to guide your growing business, you do not have to spend a fortune for legal advice. Attorneys at smaller law firms typically have a lower hourly rate than law firms that employ over 100 attorneys. A small firm's overhead is significantly lower, which means lower attorney fees for your business. Attorneys who manage their own small firms understand the ins and outs of running a small business, which is precisely the guidance that you need. Ask the uncomfortable questions about attorney fees and other expenses. Some attorneys may charge flat rates for certain transactions, and others may charge hourly. Having an idea of your legal costs up front will prevent the unpleasant surprise of a large legal bill later.



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Think of your attorney as a part of your business team. Your attorney will be familiar with the daily activities of your business, and will keep you informed of updates in the law. Your attorney might not be a full-time member of your staff today, but you should hire someone that you could work with for many years to come, and someone you can rely upon to help you build your business.



Interview prospective attorneys and take advantage of the typically free consultation to get an idea of each attorney's personality and the services his or her office provides. You should also use this time to make sure that your attorney has represented businesses that are similar to yours and can help you solve your unique business dilemmas.

Be sure that the attorney you are meeting with is in fact the attorney you will consult for business decisions, and that you will not be shuffled among members of the firm. Ask the attorney about his or her experience in various types of business law, including where he or she has practiced and for how long. In addition, you may ask the attorney if he or she is versed in issues that are important to your small business, perhaps by attending or presenting continuing legal education seminars. You should also determine if the attorney has various contacts in the legal community that are key to your business success. No single attorney will be able to handle all potential issues a small business will have—this is why it is essential that the attorney you choose has colleagues he or she may call to assist with these issues.

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Ask the attorney what the procedures are for contacting the office in the event of an emergency. Will your call be routed to a paralegal's office, or will you be able to get in touch with your attorney quickly? Will you be forced to leave a voicemail and await a call back? What is the attorney's policy on email? Your attorney needs to be responsive to be your business ally.

Choosing a skilled attorney is one of the best decisions you can make for your small business. Meaghan Schneider is an experienced business attorney and will provide general counsel services scaled to your small business. To contact Meaghan's office for a consultation, call 312-371-2800 or email her at meaghan@mls-esq.com.

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