



# HOW DO YOU FIND A GREAT ACCOUNTANT? LAWYER? ANY KIND OF BUSINESS SPECIALIST? MY BEST ADVICE: NETWORK TILL YOU DROP



## 1

### ASK THE BEST PEOPLE

To find a great lawyer, accountant, or other adviser without sorting through dozens of names, get references from the five most successful businesspeople you know. That's what I did to find a business coach—and discovered that three of my contacts worked with the same one! Joining an elite group of CEOs, like San Diego-based meeting facilitator Vistage, can also help you mine a global network of connections.

## 2

### SCREEN CAREFULLY

That said, the expert who did a great job for your friend in the *Fortune* 500 may cause a train wreck if you run a fast-growing midsize firm. Interview several candidates to get the right cultural fit. Have they served firms your size on similar projects? Are they familiar with the nuances of your industry? The answers should be yes. Ask advisers for references from clients who have worked with them for years—and actually follow up.

## 3

### SPREAD THE MONEY AROUND

I use a two-tier system for hiring advisers, turning to the priciest pros only when necessary, and more affordable experts for routine work. For instance, if I'm dealing with giant corporations or I need to carry a big stick, I hire attorneys from a brand-name law firm (and breathe easier knowing I've prevented the folks across the table from retaining them!). For basic documents, I hire a local lawyer who's very responsive—and just as competent.

## 4

### TRUST YOUR GUT

Take stock of your advisers when you get their first bill. Was it worthwhile to hire them? Do you feel they have the potential to help you earn—or save—multiples of what you're paying them? The best advisers will more than pay for themselves in the long run. If you've hired pros who didn't deliver, don't second-guess yourself about it. Fire them immediately and start over. Mediocre players won't improve with time.

## 5

### DON'T BE A CHEAPSKATE

Many entrepreneurs try to avoid paying high fees to their advisers by *not* spending enough time with them. But if you take this approach, you'll lose out on the benefits of their expertise—which will pay off bigtime in the long run. Make regular time to consult with your advisers and you'll build a much stronger, faster-growing business. Remember, the fees you pay these pros are tax-deductible.