

Running Into Clients in Public

Anyone have interesting stories about running into clients in public? In the past few months, the following two scenarios have happened to me:

- 1) Ran into a client who I represented in a retail theft case in the store from which she was convicted of stealing.
- 2) While at Home Depot after work one day, I was spotted by a lady who evidently recognized me as a lawyer she had seen at the courthouse. The lady was in a heated argument with a store cashier over a price discrepancy. She dragged me over, and yelled at the cashier "this guys a lawyer, he will tell you that you're wrong and what you're charging is illegal!" And she said to me "look at this receipt and tell her I am right." Needless to say, I declined to become involved.

Am I the only person who would rather not run into their clients in public? Obviously it is unavoidable. But then there is the awkward exchange of pleasantries, while trying not to let the people they or I am with know how it is I know them.

Happens all the time to me. But I'm in small town.

Usually it's client recognizing me; if they do I figure it's no big deal

Ronald Jones, Florida

I used to worry about running into my criminal clients in public.

Then I realized. The ones who I could run into in public are the ones that I was able to successfully defend, or at least could get them a very lenient sentence. Those people are glad to see me.

The ones who are angry at me because all of the evidence and other circumstances led to them getting a huge sentence, those folks I will never meet in public. Because they are in prison.

I don't hide the fact that I am a lawyer, so if the question comes up "How do you know X" I can just say "I once did some legal work for them" and leave it at that.

Karl E. V. Paananen

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I had a potential client who googled me and called me at home after just a basic intake meeting, when she was told someone would get back to her. She couldn't understand why this made me uncomfortable; she thought we had such a great connection and all. A bit unnerving since she lives in my community.

Fern Summer, New York

I am not an attorney, but as a private investigator living in a relatively small community, it does happen that I run into either my client or my target/subject.

On both occasions, I usually put my head down and attempt to walk in a different direction, if I spot it early enough, or just smile and nod, and continue on my merry way. Some clients, albeit infrequently, will come up to me and talk, although I always try to stay away from work related topics - you just never (EVER) know who is listening.

In fact, I had one client going through a nasty divorce and while with my family in a store he walked up to me and during our conversation he said, "I'm impressed that you are married, after all the sh*t you see on a daily basis." After I explained to him that I don't bring that "home" with me, he was shocked. OF course, in full disclosure, his soon-to-be-ex-wife had just taken a razor blade to EVERY PIECE of his clothing.

Ari

NOTE: I am not a lawyer.

Ari S. Morse

Karl, this is for you - I was once at the Peanut Shop when a lady ran up and hugged me. I couldn't place her, but I had represented her son.

I run into clients all the time, especially at Meijer's, our 24-hour grocery store chain. I always say hello. If they say more, fine, if not, fine.

On the rare occasion I'm with someone and they ask how I know a client, I shrug and say, "Oh, from around town." The client sometimes turns to whomever I'm with and says, "Yeah, she represented me!"

Lisa Babcock, Michigan

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To issues came up here:

Representing people in your community, and recognizing clients in public.

As part of the confidentiality talk, I often tell new clients that, if we pass on the street or in a store, I will not say hello unless they speak first. And I will not discuss their case with them then because (1) I'm on personal time and (2) we don't have reliable confidentiality and (3) I'm not taking a note of the meeting.

I don't usually represent community members anymore. Used to, but word would get around like a network of prairie dog tunnels. Also, I discovered pretty quick that, just like me in an embarrassing situation, clients don't want to keep running into you when they've been particularly emotional or ugly as clients.

CJ Stevens, Montana

CJ has it right.

Arthur B. Macomber, Idaho

I once read a book by Chief Justice Rehnquist he stated that clients tended to remember their lawyers how ever lawyers tend not to remember clients. Back when my office was on a street with easier parking I'd get clients dropping in some times years after I represented them thinking I could recognize them despite not having heard word one from them for like years. I'm going to start taking pictures especially the criminal clients so I can find them at cattle calls.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

Since I'm a bankruptcy attorney, I wait for my clients to acknowledge me before speaking to them in public. Most don't want their friends to know they filed, so some won't even admit they see me.

Sheila L. Rambeck, Georgia

I think my clients would be somewhat offended if I didn't acknowledge them. Maybe it's a class thing - I don't want them to think I think I'm too good to talk with them.

Also, I reflexively smile and say hello to people when I see them, especially if they look familiar. I'm from here, so there hundreds of people I've met over the past few decades whom I can't immediately place.

SoloSez Popular Threads, July 2013

I've thought about photographing clients, too. It would be nice to have a very easy reference stapled or saved right in the file. When I've thought about doing it, though, I always stop - it reminds me of (1) mug shots, or (2) the old habit of photographing would-be voters to intimidate them. (I'm not sure that's logically connected for anyone else; it's just a Jim Crow horror story that has stayed with me.)

I've asked a few clients, and they've said they wouldn't mind being photographed for the file, but I've still never done it.

-- Lisa Babcock

I run into my clients all the time around town and always say hi to them. Usually they beat me to it. If they are with someone, they inevitably refer to me as "my attorney."

I used to do a lot of traffic cases and usually only saw my client once in the office and once at court. Was really tough to remember who they were so I started taking their pictures. I told them my "insurance" required that I take pictures of my clients and none of them ever thought twice about it.

Kurt Valentine, Missouri

I was a legal assistant for a small town lawyer who defended a local teenage boy in a rape case -- he was accused of raping his cousin, who was about the same age as he -- probably 12 or 13 years old. It was a family vendetta case brought by the mother of the cousin and there was absolutely no evidence that anything had happened between the two kids. After the case was dismissed, I saw the boy and his mother in a local store. I simply smiled at them to acknowledge their presence, but out of respect for their privacy, did not speak. The boy walked over to me and without saying a word, gave me a hug and then walked away. That was the best "thank you" I ever got.

Carla L. Miller, Arkansas

I generally let the client do the greeting because if they don't want people to know I know them that is their call. Considering I do bk, and a lot of people like to keep that to themselves.

Lesley Hoenig, Michigan

Wear a baseball cap and sunglasses or move to NYC.

Michael A. Huerta, New York

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Mental health professionals will not even acknowledge patients in public. They will speak to clients in public, but only after the client initiates contact. Attorneys are supposed to keep the identities of their clients confidential. Might the same philosophy apply to attorneys?

William B. Richards

What about getting stopped by a traffic cop and checked out on their computer scan system? I wonder if the traffic cop can tell right there if you are an attorney and if you practice certain kinds of law, such as criminal defense and police misconduct? Do traffic cops check out the internet, LinkedIn profiles, websites, etc. --- all before they decide to write a citation????

Roberta Fay, California
