HOW TO CHOOSE A MAJOR CRIMES ATTORNEY

or Any Criminal Defense Attorney for That Matter

SECOND EDITION



ROCKY BRANCATO, ESQ.

Former Chief Operations Officer, Hillsborough County Public Defender's Office

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By Rocky Brancato, Esq.

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Dedication

For Holy,
Thank you for standing beside me through every challenge. You have been my strength and my clarity, and your belief in me has never wavered. That has made all the difference.

For Kaia,
Your bright and hopeful view of the world reminds me why I fight for a justice that demands real proof, respects individual rights, and resists the slow erosion of fairness by those in power. It is the justice our founders imagined, and it is still worth defending.

For Julie,
Your wisdom, strength, and mentorship have shaped so many of us. You made skilled attorneys, and you made principled, compassionate people. I count myself lucky to be one of them.

This book is also dedicated to the warrior attorneys who pursue justice above all, and to the clients who place their futures in our hands.

Disclaimer

This book is for informational purposes only. It is not legal advice and does not replace consultation with an attorney. Reading or purchasing this book does not create an attorney-client relationship with the author or The Brancato Law Firm, P.A.

Every legal case is different. Outcomes depend on specific facts, laws, procedures, and timing. If you are facing criminal charges or are under investigation, consult a qualified and experienced criminal defense attorney.

Preface to the Second Edition

When I wrote the first edition of this book, I had just opened The Brancato Law Firm. Since then, the firm has grown. We did not set out to get big. More people came to us looking for the kind of defense this book describes than one lawyer could serve well.

Meeting that demand meant building a team. Our first attorney hire was Jean-Luc Adrien. He came to Tampa from The Bronx Defenders in New York City and rose to Division Chief at the Hillsborough County Public Defender's Office, where I supervised him. We work closely together. I set the standards every case must meet and help guide the strategy, and we rely on each other's judgment every day.

Growing the firm also made me sharpen one of the central points of this book. In the first edition, I warned you about firms where the lawyer in the advertisement disappears and your case goes to someone with little experience. That warning stands. What I want to be precise about is where the danger lies. A firm with more than one lawyer is fine, and so is a firm with lawyers early in their careers. Every great trial lawyer was a new lawyer once, including

me. The danger is a lawyer left alone with a case beyond their experience, with no one seasoned setting the standard, shaping the strategy, or checking the work.

I spent years as a training director, designing the trial programs that hundreds of Tampa Bay attorneys have completed. Good trial lawyers are trained under close supervision by people who have done the work. A firm that builds its team that way is doing what the best defense offices have always done.

This edition keeps the message of the first edition and adds the questions that separate a well-built team from a volume operation. The goal is the same as before: to help you hire the right defense the first time.

Rocky Brancato

Preface

You may be reading this because someone you care about is facing serious charges. Maybe you are under investigation or have already been charged, or you are preparing for the worst just in case. Whatever brought you here, I wrote this book for you.

It is meant to be read in one sitting, usually thirty minutes to an hour. Your time is limited, and you have a lot to prepare for.

The book focuses on how to find a major crimes attorney, a lawyer who handles the most serious criminal charges. The lessons apply to anyone hiring a defense attorney for any charge, and they may be especially helpful if you are making that decision for the first time.

True major crimes attorneys are the top tier of criminal defense lawyers. They take on the most complex, high-stakes cases (murder, sexual battery, child abuse, armed robbery) and see them through in court. Their business comes from skill, preparation, and trial experience more than from marketing.

If you learn how to find a lawyer at this level, you will be able to hire the right attorney for any kind of criminal case.

Many attorneys call themselves something they are not. Some advertise “major crimes” but have never stood in front of a jury in a trial involving a life felony. Others tried a case once and have since built businesses around volume instead of outcomes. Some do great work on traffic or misdemeanor cases, and that still does not prepare them to defend someone accused of sexual battery or murder.

The advice in this book comes from real courtroom experience. Through examples and warnings, I will help you ask the right questions, recognize red flags, and see what real advocacy looks like before it is too late.

I did not write this to frighten you. I wrote it so you can see the choice in front of you clearly, which is the most useful thing you can have when everything is on the line.

Rocky Brancato

Trial Attorney, Criminal Defense Strategist, Advocate

About the Author

Rocky Brancato is a trial attorney with more than 25 years of experience defending people charged with the most serious crimes under Florida law. He has built his career in the Tampa Bay area on cases other attorneys avoid: allegations of sexual battery, child abuse, homicide (including death penalty cases), and violent felonies where the stakes can be life and death. Over his career, he has handled thousands of felony cases.

Before entering private practice, Brancato served as Chief Operations Officer and second-in-command of the Office of the Public Defender for Florida's 13th Judicial Circuit in Hillsborough County, where he oversaw a staff of over 100 attorneys. It is still the largest criminal defense office in the Tampa Bay area.

He also spent years in an elite major crimes unit, handling homicides, sex crimes, and child abuse cases. There, he built a reputation for trial work and for his careful handling of forensic evidence, medical records, and expert testimony. That high-volume, high-stakes work is the foundation of his practice today.

As the office's training director, Brancato designed the trial skills programs that every new public defender went through. Hundreds of Tampa Bay attorneys have trained under him, and some of them now serve as judges. He has also taught criminal procedure, criminal law, and courtroom testimony as a police academy instructor.

Brancato has held an AV Preeminent® rating from Martindale-Hubbell, the highest peer rating for legal ability and ethical standards, every year since 2015. He has been named to the Florida Super Lawyers list and to The National Trial Lawyers Top 100 and holds a 10.0 Avvo rating. In 2024, he received the Hillsborough County Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers' Julianne M. Holt Torchbearer Award.

As founder of The Brancato Law Firm, P.A., Brancato sets the standards for every case the firm accepts and works closely with the firm's attorneys on strategy. He built the firm on what he learned running a large defense office: serious cases are won by teams that are well led, well trained, and held to a high standard.

He has worked with some of the country's top medical and forensic experts and knows how to build

a defense that answers both the science and the story behind a charge.

He wrote this book to help ordinary people, often in crisis, avoid mistakes he has watched too many people make. In the criminal justice system, there are rarely second chances, so he wants readers to hire the right attorney the first time.

Brancato grew up in a military family and lived and studied across the United States before making Florida his home. He lives and practices in Tampa.

About Jean-Luc Adrien

Jean-Luc Adrien is a criminal trial attorney at The Brancato Law Firm, P.A. He is a graduate of New York University School of Law, where he was a Root-Tilden-Kern Scholar, and he is admitted to practice in Florida and New York. He has spent his entire legal career on the defense side.

Before coming to Tampa, Jean-Luc served at The Bronx Defenders in New York City, one of the best-known public defender offices in the country. The Bronx Defenders developed the holistic defense model, in which criminal defense lawyers work alongside civil, family, and immigration lawyers, social workers, and investigators to address the many

ways a criminal charge can affect a client's life. The office represents nearly 20,000 Bronx residents a year, and its work has earned national recognition, including the National Legal Aid & Defender Association's Clara Shortridge Foltz Award.

He then joined the Office of the Public Defender for Florida's 13th Judicial Circuit in Hillsborough County, where he became a Division Chief, leading and developing a division of attorneys while handling serious cases from DUIs to homicides. Rocky Brancato supervised him there and hand-selected him as the firm's first attorney hire.

Jean-Luc speaks Spanish, Haitian Creole, and French, so he can talk with clients, families, and witnesses in their own languages. He holds a 10/10 Top Rated Lawyer rating on Justia and co-hosts the firm's legal education videos, including his own series, How Criminal Law Actually Works: Justice With Jean-Luc.

Chapter One

What Is a Major Crimes Attorney?

If you are facing a charge like sexual battery, homicide, aggravated child abuse, or armed robbery, a general defense attorney is not enough. You need a lawyer who specializes in the most serious cases: a major crimes attorney.

No official certification for that title exists. Florida Bar rules require claims of expertise to be objectively verifiable, but no certification defines this title, so lawyers with very different records use the same label.

Real major crimes attorneys are built in the courtroom, case after case and trial after trial, under pressure. They know the law, and they know how it plays out when everything is on the line.

Most attorneys with this kind of experience got it in government offices like the State Attorney's Office or the Public Defender's Office. The toughest cases go there, and lawyers there handle more serious cases than anyone else. Difficult facts, emotional charges, and complex evidence often arrive all at once, and the work tests a lawyer's skill, judgment, and grit.

Some private attorneys started in those agencies and kept doing high-level work after joining a firm. Others were trained and mentored by former prosecutors or public defenders who had done major crimes work themselves. That second path is rarer. Few private firms see enough serious cases to train a lawyer this way, and few have a seasoned trial lawyer willing to put in the time. When a firm has both, the mentorship benefits its lawyers and its clients.

Trial experience is only part of it. The best major crimes attorneys also invest in advanced training, including programs on defending death penalty cases. These are intensive, expert-led courses on forensic evidence, mental health defenses, and constitutional law, far beyond a weekend seminar.

Top lawyers also attend national programs to keep up with how to challenge DNA, digital evidence, and psychological evaluations. Many learn the science well enough to understand it better than the prosecution's own experts.

The best are also active in their local legal communities. They mentor, teach, and help shape how criminal defense is practiced.

Most important, they have tried serious cases. Dozens of them, and sometimes more than a

hundred, as I have. They have taken sex crimes, violent felonies, and homicides to trial. They know how to question jurors, cross-examine hostile witnesses, and explain complicated facts in plain language, and they know what persuades a jury.

They work with experts such as forensic pathologists, trauma doctors, DNA scientists, and psychologists, and they know how to use expert testimony to attack the state's case or support their own. Over the years, they have built relationships with credible professionals who hold up in court.

Many also work with mitigation specialists, who look into a client's personal history, mental health, or trauma. That work can change the outcome at sentencing, especially when the goal is to avoid life in prison.

Experienced major crimes attorneys know juries. They have a feel for whom to trust, how to ask questions during jury selection, and how to read body language and tone. Some work with jury consultants on picking a panel and presenting the case.

What sets them apart most is that they are not afraid of trial. They prepare every case as if it will be tried. Prosecutors and judges know who they are. They are

creative and strategic, and they find angles and build defenses that other lawyers never consider.

The best of them also pass on their experience. They build teams around that mindset, train the lawyers who work with them, and hold every case to the same standard.

If you are facing serious criminal charges, this is the kind of lawyer who should be leading your defense. Anything less could cost you your freedom.

Chapter Two

What a Major Crimes Attorney Is Not

Online, it is easy to mistake appearance for reality. People facing criminal charges are scared and overwhelmed, and many make rushed decisions based on flashy advertising or bold promises. That is when the costly mistakes happen.

Start with something most people do not know. Under Florida Bar rules, an attorney may advertise that they handle "sex crimes," "violent crimes," or "gun charges" without ever having taken one of those cases to trial. As long as they "intend" to handle such cases, the rules allow it. Intent is not experience, and in major crimes defense, experience is what counts.

Anyone can build a professional-looking website and pay for top placement on Google. With enough money, an attorney can dominate search results and show up everywhere you look. None of that tells you whether they can try a case. Some of the most heavily marketed firms are built around business first and trial work second.

I do not fault anyone for running a business. Our firm is a business too, and it has to stay financially

strong to keep providing high-level representation. We are trial lawyers first, though. A law firm has to work as a business to survive, but its clients need it to work at the highest level of advocacy, and we have never lost sight of that.

That is why sophisticated clients choose firms like ours. You are reading this book because you want a lawyer who will put you in the strongest position to get back the life you had before the investigation or the charge.

At many high-volume firms, the face you saw online may never touch your file. Your case is handed off and left there. The attorney who gets it may have considerable experience or may be just a year or two out of the State Attorney's or Public Defender's Office. Either way, no seasoned lawyer reviews the work, shapes the strategy, or steps in when the case gets hard. The business model is volume: sign as many clients as possible, move them through the system, and keep the machine running. That model leaves little room for investigation, creative strategy, or real courtroom preparation.

The difference matters. The best defense offices have always put newer attorneys in a structured program of training and supervision, with an experienced trial

lawyer setting the standard and guiding the strategy. A newer attorney left alone with too many cases and no one checking the work is something else entirely. So ask who is on your case, and also ask who is leading it and whether someone with real experience is accountable for the result.

Be careful with firms that use “former public defender” or “former prosecutor” as a marketing hook. Those are important jobs, but the title alone tells you little. How long were they in the office? Which divisions did they work in? Were they promoted to handle major crimes? Did they leave before seeing a serious case? Did they rise high enough to mentor others? Did they struggle under pressure?

Some attorneys leave public service ready to do more. Others leave because they cannot keep up. You will learn which is which from their results and from the questions you ask, not from the job title.

Also watch for firms that trade on a reputation but no longer practice law in any real sense. Some well-known attorneys now work mainly as figureheads. Their name is on the door, but they may be on an extended vacation, paying attention to little besides the firm’s revenue. They do not review the evidence,

shape the strategy, or work on your case. Your life ends up in the hands of someone you have never met, who may lack the skill or experience for the fight ahead and has no experienced lawyer behind them.

Trying a handful of serious cases does not make someone a major crimes attorney. When the charges carry life sentences, even ten or fifteen jury trials may not be enough. This work takes years in the courtroom and a record of handling high-pressure litigation. In a case like that, the attorney leading your defense should have that record and should be doing much more than lending a name to the file.

Ads, titles, and reputation will not defend you in court. The next chapter covers the specific warning signs to watch for when you choose your defense attorney.

Chapter Three

The Red Flags to Watch For

Now that you know what a major crimes attorney is and what one is not, here are the warning signs. Missing them can cost you your future.

Red Flag 1: Visibility Without Substance

An attorney's face may be everywhere: Google, YouTube, bus benches, social media. Being everywhere does not make them good. Often it only means they spend heavily on advertising.

Most people do not realize that every click on a Google ad for "Top Criminal Lawyer Near Me" may cost that firm hundreds of dollars. The firm pays that amount just for the click, before any consultation or conversation.

To keep up, these firms often spend tens of thousands of dollars a month, sometimes more. That money has to come from somewhere, and that is where the pressure starts.

Volume becomes the model. To keep the lights on, the firm has to sign a lot of clients. Cases get stacked,

moved quickly, and resolved with as little effort as possible, and efficiency replaces strategy.

You can feel that pressure on the first phone call. At some firms, you never speak with anyone who has legal training. You speak with a salesperson whose job is to build rapport, create urgency, and get a signature.

A firm whose intake is handled by its legal team is different. Many well-run firms have an attorney or another legal professional take the first call, gather the facts, explain how the process works, and quote a fee, so the attorneys handling cases can stay focused on their current clients. That is usually a sign the firm is organized.

The warning sign is pressure: being pushed to sign before your questions are answered or before you know who will work on your case. Before you sign anything, find out which attorneys will handle your defense and who is ultimately responsible for it.

Red Flag 2: The Disappearing Attorney

The next red flag is the disappearing attorney. A serious case often should have more than one lawyer, so the number of lawyers is not the issue. The issue is that the experienced attorney you were sold on

vanishes once you sign. Your case gets passed along, no one with real trial experience reviews the work, and the expert from the advertisement never looks at your file again. So ask:

Who will be working on my case? Who will take depositions, argue motions, and try the case if it comes to that? Who reviews their work and shapes the strategy? Will an experienced trial lawyer stay involved from beginning to end?

Red Flag 3: Vague Experience

If an attorney says they have "handled serious cases" but cannot name a single jury trial or avoids giving numbers, take it as a warning.

Real trial lawyers know their records. Ask about their history, and they will give you examples of the hard cases they have tried.

Red Flag 4: Overstating "Connections"

Be wary of "connections" offered as a selling point. You may hear "I know the prosecutor" or "The judge and I have a relationship." It sounds impressive and rarely is.

Any experienced local attorney has spent time with prosecutors and judges. That familiarity is expected, and it does not get your case special treatment.

If a lawyer leans on relationships instead of results, ask what the relationship will actually do for your defense. Often the talk of connections covers a lack of trial experience.

Red Flag 5: Promises

The most dangerous red flag is a promise. If an attorney says "I can get this dismissed" or "I know how this will end," stop the conversation. No attorney can promise a result, and the Florida Bar prohibits it.

A lawyer who makes promises is either desperate for your business or willing to say whatever you want to hear. You do not want either one beside you when the government is trying to take your freedom.

Listen to Your Gut

Beyond the red flags, pay attention when something feels off. Do you feel rushed or pressured to sign before you have had time to think? Are your questions answered or deflected with vague reassurance and legal jargon?

Hiring an attorney should never feel like buying a car. The right attorney respects your intelligence, explains the risks, walks you through your options, and lets their record speak for itself.

Trials Are Won with Preparation

Trials are won with preparation, insight, and the calm that comes from having stood in front of juries many times.

When your future is on the line, you need an advocate who has been there before and is ready to stand beside you now.

Chapter Four

How to Choose a Major Crimes Attorney, or Any Criminal Defense Attorney for That Matter

If you take one message from this book, take this one: nothing substitutes for real courtroom experience. General practice and a passing familiarity with the law are not enough. What matters is high-stakes litigation experience, meaning jury trials, motion hearings, and sentencing arguments in cases with life-altering consequences. That should guide your choice in any criminal case, however serious.

The last chapter covered what to avoid. This one covers what to look for in the attorneys and firms equipped to handle a major crimes case.

Prepared for Trial from Day One

The best attorneys do not measure success by how quickly a case is resolved, and they do not count on the prosecutor to offer something fair. They prepare every case for trial.

That preparation gives your attorney leverage. The prosecutor and the court can see your attorney is ready to try the case, and that changes how they approach it. Preparation also exposes the weak points in the government's case and the openings for negotiation, if negotiating turns out to be the right path.

Preparing for trial from day one also turns up legal and evidentiary issues that can support motions challenging the admissibility of evidence, the reliability of a witness, or the conduct of the investigation.

Trial preparation can also uncover mitigation: details of your life story, mental health history, or background that move the conversation from punishment toward understanding. These details give the court and the prosecutor context for the charges and help them see you as a person. Our firm offers every client an in-house mitigation report that tells the client's story in a form prosecutors and judges can use.

Act Before Charges Are Filed

If you are under investigation and have not been charged, you may have a window most people do not

know exists. Before prosecutors decide whether to file charges, a defense attorney can contact them, point out the problems with the case, and, in the right case, provide information that changes the decision. In Hillsborough County, some diversion programs can even be arranged before charges are filed if the defense reaches the State Attorney's Office early enough.

Pre-file representation is a staple of our practice. Nearly every month, cases we handle are never filed because of the work we do at the front end. What to share with investigators, if anything, is a strategic decision we make case by case.

Ask any attorney you interview whether they will contact the prosecutor before charges are filed and what they would do in your case during that window.

Ask the Right Questions

When you meet with an attorney or firm, ask direct questions:

- How many jury trials have the attorneys who will work on my case handled?
- What kinds of cases were they?
- Have they tried cases similar to mine?
- Can you provide case numbers?

Most criminal cases are public record in Florida, so a serious attorney will give you specifics without hesitating.

Also ask:

- Which attorneys will work on my case, and what will each of them do?
- Who will take depositions, argue motions, and go to trial if needed?
- Who sets the strategy, and how involved will your most experienced trial lawyer be?
- How does your firm review discovery, such as video, phone extractions, and large sets of records?

If the answers are vague or no one with real trial experience will commit to being involved in your defense, treat that as a warning.

Reviews, Ratings, and Referrals

Online reviews can help, but keep them in perspective. Many five-star ratings come from clients whose cases were resolved with little litigation, and a polished website with glowing testimonials may say little about courtroom ability.

A lawyer's reputation among other lawyers tells you more. One of the most credible measures is the Martindale-Hubbell® peer rating system, which

rates attorneys based on reviews from judges and other lawyers. Its highest rating, AV Preeminent®, reflects legal skill, ethics, communication, and judgment. A lawyer cannot buy it.

You can also ask other attorneys, even ones who do not practice criminal law. Many know the reputations of the serious trial attorneys in their community, and what lawyers say about each other means more than who ranks highest online.

Super Lawyers and Rising Stars

Super Lawyers is another peer-based measure. Lawyers are selected through peer nominations, independent research, and review by a panel of experienced lawyers in each practice area. It publishes two lists, and they mean different things.

The Super Lawyers list is limited to no more than 5 percent of the lawyers in a state. The Rising Stars list is limited to no more than 2.5 percent, and only lawyers who are 40 or younger or who have practiced for 10 years or less are eligible. Rising Stars is a real honor for talented lawyers early in their careers, but it is a different list. If a firm advertises Super Lawyers, ask which list each of its lawyers was named to and in what year.

Super Lawyers rates only lawyers the public can hire, so prosecutors and public defenders cannot be selected while they work for the government. A strong lawyer who recently left one of those offices may have no Super Lawyers recognition yet. In that case, judge them by their trial record.

Titles Do Not Tell the Whole Story

Some firms advertise credentials like “former prosecutor” or “former lead trial attorney.” Those titles can mislead. In many jurisdictions, “lead trial attorney” is an entry-level supervisory job, often the first promotion in a felony division. It does not mean the attorney has handled murder or sex crimes.

Ask deeper questions:

- What types of cases did you handle in that role?
- How long were you in that position?
- Did you work in a specialized major crimes unit?

Work in a major crimes unit is very different from handling an ordinary felony caseload. The person leading your defense should have defended or prosecuted the highest-level charges under serious pressure.

Not every top attorney started in a prosecutor's office. Some built their experience as public defenders or in private practice. The path matters less than the experience they have now.

Communication Style Matters

The right attorney listens more than they talk. They ask about your goals, your concerns, and your background, and they explain the law in terms you understand.

You should feel treated as a person, not a file number. In a criminal case, you may have to share painful or very personal details, so you need an attorney you can be honest with and who will be honest with you.

Ask how the firm communicates:

- Will you have direct contact with the attorneys on your case?
- Is there a secure portal for exchanging documents and discovery?
- How quickly are calls and messages returned?

The best attorneys are accessible and organized. They respond promptly, prepare their clients thoroughly, and keep them informed.

Who Will Actually Represent You?

Do not assume the attorney you first speak with will be the only one handling your case or that they will handle it at all. Ask, and get the answer in writing.

If you are considering a firm with more than one attorney, ask:

- Will the attorney I am meeting with stay involved?
- Who will handle case preparation, motion hearings, depositions, and trial?
- Who supervises the work, and how often does your most experienced trial lawyer review my case?

If you are considering a solo practitioner, ask:

- How many active cases are you handling right now?
- How many major cases are you managing at once?

A heavy caseload can mean your case will not get the time it needs. Trial preparation is labor-intensive. Discovery has to be reviewed thoroughly, and a strategy has to be built, so you need a lawyer or a team with the time to do the work.

A reputable attorney or firm will turn down a case before taking it on and doing substandard work. You

want an attorney who knows their limits and will not water down their representation.

Ask the firm to name the attorneys assigned to your case in your engagement agreement. If a firm will not tell you in writing who is responsible for your defense, do not hire it.

Experience Should Lead the Team

One lawyer working alone rarely defends a serious case well. The strongest defenses I have been part of were team efforts. Experienced trial lawyers led them. Attorneys earlier in their careers did careful, detailed work under supervision, and investigators, experts, and support staff worked toward the same goal. The best public defender major crimes units work this way, and so did the defenses in the cases you will read about in Chapter Six.

Our firm works this way too. I set the standards every case must meet and help guide the strategy, and our attorneys work closely together. Jean-Luc Adrien and I have worked side by side since I supervised him at the Public Defender's Office. As the firm grows, the attorneys who join us train the way good trial lawyers always have: under close supervision, with

experienced lawyers holding them to the same standard.

For clients facing the most serious charges who want every available resource, we can also build a larger trial team, bringing in attorneys we know and trust from the Tampa Bay legal community and across Florida. That is an added option on top of the firm's own attorneys.

So the right question is not whether the lawyer on the billboard will personally do everything. No lawyer at a busy firm that handles serious cases can do that, and a lawyer who claims to may be stretched too thin to do it well. Ask instead: Who is leading my defense? Who is accountable for the quality of the work? Is someone with real trial experience shaping the strategy and checking the details?

A firm that answers those questions clearly and puts the answers in writing is built to defend you.

Know What Confidence Looks Like

A confident attorney talks about the process, not guarantees.

The right attorney will not make promises. They will explain the process, lay out your options, and give you a candid view of what is ahead. They will not

pressure you to sign on the spot, and if they are not the right fit for your case, they will tell you.

When you meet the right attorney, you may still be afraid, but you will be informed and will start to see a way forward. The fear does not go away. You stop being confused, and you have someone capable carrying the weight with you.

Chapter Five

Understanding Attorney Fees in Criminal Cases

Everyone has seen the personal injury ads promising "You pay nothing unless we win." That works in civil cases. In criminal defense, contingency fees are prohibited, and for good reason: your freedom should not be a bet.

So how do criminal defense attorneys get paid, and what should you expect when you hire one for a serious case?

Flat Fees: The Most Common Model

Most criminal defense attorneys charge a flat fee, a fixed amount for handling your case. The amount depends on how serious the charge is, how complex the evidence is, and how much time the case will take.

A case involving driving without a valid license costs less than a DUI. A DUI costs less than a DUI with injury. A homicide or sexual battery case may cost far more than either.

Serious cases take serious time. A skilled attorney may spend hundreds of hours on your defense and turn away other cases to give yours the attention it needs. The fee reflects both the work and the cases the attorney gives up.

All-Inclusive vs. Tiered Fee Structures

Some attorneys charge one flat fee that covers everything, including pretrial motions, depositions, hearings, and trial. Our firm prefers this model. It encourages preparation and lets us build the case properly, and the client never feels pushed to avoid trial because it would cost more.

Other firms split the fee into stages: one flat amount for everything up to trial and another if the case goes to trial. Some refund part of the trial fee if the case resolves just before trial. Many do not.

Some attorneys use a hybrid: a retainer covering a set number of hours, then hourly billing. That is more common in federal and white-collar cases than in state criminal defense.

Whatever the structure, know exactly what you are paying for, and get it in writing.

Why Good Representation Costs More

A highly experienced attorney may quote a five- or six-figure fee for a major case. That sounds high, and so are the stakes.

The fee does not buy a guaranteed outcome. It buys experience, judgment, and strategy built over decades in real courtrooms.

Often the best outcomes happen quietly. In many cases, an experienced attorney can meet with prosecutors early and show them the flaws in the case before charges are filed. Those outcomes never make the news, and they change lives.

Avoid the Bargain Trap

If one attorney quotes a much lower fee than the others, ask why. How many cases are they juggling to make up the difference? How much time will they really have for yours?

Your life is not a discount item. You deserve someone who has built defenses like yours before and has the time to build this one.

The Public Defender May Be a Better Choice

If you cannot afford a strong private attorney, you may be better off with a public defender than with a low-cost private lawyer.

Some of the most talented attorneys in the courthouse work in public defender offices, especially in major crimes units. They handle serious cases every day and have real trial experience. In many counties, they can also get due process funds or court-approved funding for experts and investigators.

During my time at the public defender's office, I cleaned up after inexperienced private attorneys. I also won cases for clients who had no money but had a skilled public defender and a fair fight.

Hiring a private attorney is not always better than having a public defender.

The Value of a Well-Run Firm

Not every top attorney charges extreme fees. A well-run firm can deliver high-level defense at a fair price. A firm that is not spending tens of thousands of dollars a month on pay-per-click ads does not need to pass that cost on to you.

A well-run firm also uses its people well. Experienced trial lawyers spend their time on the judgment calls, strategy, and courtroom work that need their experience. Other attorneys and staff, trained and supervised, handle work that does not require decades of courtroom experience.

Technology is part of this. A serious case can now come with hundreds of hours of body camera video, full phone extractions, and thousands of pages of records. Our firm built its own proprietary system for organizing and reviewing case evidence, and no other firm has it. It lets our attorneys review a large discovery file more quickly and thoroughly to find what matters, so their time goes to judgment and strategy. The conclusions are still our lawyers' own.

Done right, that structure keeps the quality of your defense high and lets the firm give serious cases the time they need without charging a fee no family can pay.

Look for a firm that puts your money into your case instead of its marketing.

Know the Difference Between Fees and Costs

Attorney fees pay for the lawyer's time. Costs are separate. They are third-party expenses needed to defend your case, such as:

- Court reporters
- Expert witnesses
- Private investigators
- Psychological evaluations
- Medical records
- Out-of-town travel for witnesses

Some firms ask for a cost deposit, held in a trust account to pay for these items. Others ask you to pay costs as they come up. Both are ethical, but a deposit prevents delays and lets the attorney act quickly when something is needed.

Make sure you understand how costs will be handled and ask for an accounting.

Final Thought: You Are Paying for Protection

No one plans to hire a criminal defense attorney, and most people have not budgeted for it, so a serious fee can feel overwhelming.

Consider what is at stake: your freedom, your future, and your name.

The right attorney will not make promises. They will protect you and fight so the system does not silence you, rush you, or bury you.

If you are helping a family member, whether a spouse, a child, or a parent, ask yourself what you would give to make sure they had someone truly prepared to defend them. That is what the fee pays for.

Chapter Six

The Experts Behind the Curtain: How Forensic Specialists, Medical Experts, and Investigators Can Save a Case (and a Life)

Most people think courtroom victories come from persuasive arguments, compelling witnesses, and a sharp attorney. Those matter. In major crimes cases, though, especially those involving violence, sexual abuse, or death, the difference between conviction and acquittal, prison and freedom, often comes from work done long before trial.

Behind every well-defended case is a team that most jurors, and many clients, never see: forensic pathologists, DNA scientists, geneticists, medical examiners, mitigation specialists, and private investigators. A good attorney knows the law and also knows when to bring in people who can explain the facts better than anyone else.

This chapter covers several cases in which experts changed the outcome by changing everyone's understanding of what had happened. These outcomes were not miracles. They show what

experience, persistence, and good science can do together.

Case Example: From Murder to Child Neglect, with Expert Help

Few accusations are more devastating than causing the death of a child. In this case, my client, a grandmother, was arrested and charged with first-degree murder and aggravated child abuse after her young granddaughter died. The prosecution's theory was horrifying. They said she lost her temper while bathing the child and beat her so badly that the child died of internal injuries, including a lacerated liver.

The Child Protection Team doctor assigned to the case decided early and firmly that the injuries could only have been inflicted on purpose. Once that opinion was issued, the rest of the system lined up behind it. The autopsy report agreed. The photos were grim. The prosecution was confident in its case, but confidence is not proof.

As always, I started with the medical records: every page, note, and image. Then I did something many attorneys skip. I brought in a former state medical examiner who had performed thousands of autopsies and testified many times. Given his former role, the state would have a hard time discrediting him.

His first instruction was to get the slides, the microscopic tissue samples taken during the autopsy. Lawyers often overlook them, and they can tell you a great deal. We obtained the slides along with the scene photographs, the hospital records, and the original autopsy report.

Reviewing the material, the expert noticed something in the scene photos from the family's home: medical waste. Airways, suction equipment, and other trauma gear used to try to revive the child were scattered around, and that opened a new line of inquiry.

After careful analysis, he concluded that the child had drowned in the bathtub, a tragic accident that happened while her grandmother was briefly out of the room. He believed the liver injury was consistent with aggressive resuscitation, not a beating. Emergency responders had done everything they could to revive her, and chest compressions on a child that small could cause internal trauma that was later mistaken for abuse.

The truth was more complicated than the accusation. The grandmother had been negligent. She was going back and forth between the bathroom and the kitchen, where she was preparing chicken for dinner,

and she was not paying close enough attention. Her inattention had a tragic consequence. She was still neither a murderer nor a child abuser.

At the time, I was also mentoring two bright young attorneys who worked the case with me. They gathered records, prepared materials, and made sure no detail was missed. They learned firsthand how a case like this is built. That is how good trial lawyers are made, and our firm trains attorneys the same way today.

We took the findings to the prosecution. The murder charge was dropped, and the aggravated child abuse charge was reduced. My client pleaded to the lesser charge of child neglect and was sentenced to probation.

She was not entirely innocent, but the state had grossly overcharged her. Without the right expert, that might never have come to light. She would have been painted as a monster instead of a flawed caretaker, and she likely would have died in prison, labeled as something she never was.

Case Example: When the Science Was on Our Side

In more than 25 years of criminal defense, I have gotten results that most people would call remarkable, and some that are almost unheard of. I am a skilled attorney, and I will say so, but those results almost never came from me alone. They came from digging deeper than the other side and bringing in experts who could change everyone's understanding of what happened.

One of the clearest examples was a young father accused of aggravated child abuse, a charge that carried up to thirty years in prison.

His toddler daughter had been rushed to the hospital with a fractured pancreas. That injury is rare, and the Child Protection Team's state doctor immediately focused on the father. There were no prior incidents and no warning signs in the home. Once the state doctor formed his opinion, though, the whole child welfare system turned against the father. Within hours, the child was taken from both parents. Within days, he was under investigation for intentionally causing a traumatic injury.

A criminal case was filed and a dependency case opened. The Department of Children and Families

signaled it would move to terminate his parental rights. Almost overnight, he went from being an involved father to being a suspected abuser.

From the start, the state's theory did not make sense to me, so I did what many attorneys do not do. I examined all the records: medical records from birth to the present, specialist visits, test results, surgical notes, and radiology reports. I spent months studying the child's entire medical history.

I also brought in a forensic pathologist who knew how to read medical records, had testified in complex abuse cases, and could distinguish traumatic injury from natural disease.

The turning point came when my expert focused on something the Child Protection Team doctor had missed: a congenital choledochal cyst, a rare bile duct malformation present from birth. Our expert believed it played a direct role in the injury. The family knew about the condition, but the state's doctors never considered it a possible cause.

I deposed nearly every doctor who had treated the child at hospitals across Florida and traveled to a specialized hospital in Pennsylvania. As we built the case, it became clear that the state's lead doctor was worse than mistaken. His work was questionable.

After one particularly revealing deposition, that doctor, perhaps realizing how badly it had gone, called the State Attorney's Office and told them they should hire me. It was an odd, presumptuous thing to do, and I had no interest in switching sides. It did tell me that even the state's own expert knew I had found something significant.

My expert was in the trenches with me the whole way. He prepared me for depositions, reviewed transcripts, and helped me find the words to explain a complex medical truth to a jury. We never had to use them.

The charges were dismissed, and my client no longer had the threat of prison hanging over him. He will probably never forget what it felt like to be called a child abuser, to have his daughter taken, and to see doubt in the faces of friends, family, and strangers who believed the worst before the facts were clear.

That is why I fight cases like this the way I do. If we had not found the right expert, asked the right questions, and looked past the obvious, a good father would be in prison right now for something he did not do.

Case Example: When Forensic DNA Science Carried the Day

In another case, I represented a combat veteran still serving in the Army Reserve who was arrested in a cold-hit sexual battery case. The incident had happened nearly eight years earlier. The victim had been sexually assaulted and severely beaten, and the crime scene photos were graphic and disturbing. If the case had gone to trial without the right investigation, it almost certainly would have ended in a conviction.

DNA was at the center of the state's case. A partial DNA profile recovered at the time of the offense was run years later through CODIS, the national DNA database, and came back as a "cold hit" to my client. The prosecution believed it had a match.

A cold hit is only as reliable as the science and interpretation behind it. I started by subpoenaing the bench notes from the state's forensic laboratory. These are the analyst's handwritten or typed records of the testing, covering procedures, observations, amplification levels, and more. They show how the analyst reached the conclusions, not just what the conclusions were.

I also obtained the electronic raw data from the lab's analysis and sent it to a confidential private laboratory. Those consultants did not testify. They gave me a second, neutral set of eyes and advised me.

Their review turned up a serious problem. In their view, the state's analyst may have misread one of the alleles in my client's profile at a specific location. When the evidence profile and a person's profile truly differ at a location, that difference can exclude the person, so one misread allele can decide whether someone is identified or cleared.

To address the issue fully, I retained a university professor who was a geneticist and DNA specialist with courtroom experience. He could explain the science clearly to a judge or jury.

He reviewed the state's lab reports, the bench notes, the raw data, and my confidential lab's findings. He concluded that the profile the state relied on did not match my client at one critical locus, or location in the DNA profile.

He also traveled with me and sat beside me at every deposition of the state's forensic experts. He prepared me with the right questions, caught subtle inconsistencies in their findings, and helped me build a clear challenge to their interpretation.

Then the case began to turn. One of the state's experts eventually agreed that they had it wrong and that the DNA did not match at the required threshold. Another expert would not admit the mistake, and her testimony fell apart under questioning.

Facing the scientific evidence and the disagreement among its own analysts, the prosecutor dismissed the case.

My client had served his country honorably and had come close to being wrongfully convicted. He was cleared. Without the extra work, the challenge to the state's assumptions, and the right expert, he might have spent the rest of his life in prison. Like many others, this case was won with science, preparation, and a strong partnership with a real expert.

The Bigger Picture: Why Experts Are Sometimes Not Optional

Outcomes like these come from deep investigation, relentless preparation, and the strategic use of expert witnesses. None of them was a one-person effort. Lawyers, experts, investigators, and staff won each one together, with an experienced trial lawyer leading the way.

A good major crimes attorney will be able to give you examples like these, cases in which the right expert and the right questions made the impossible possible.

If the right experts cannot be retained, a good attorney may not take your case at all. They want to help, but they know what a case like yours requires, and they will not sign on unless they believe they can make a difference. An honest lawyer does that.

Often a family member, not the client, pays for the attorney and the experts. That is common in major crimes cases, especially when the accused is in jail or has no money. If the attorney learns there will not be enough money to defend the case properly, meaning the essential costs as well as the fee, they may advise the family to let the Public Defender's Office handle it.

That advice is no insult to the public defender. As I said earlier, in many jurisdictions the public defender's office can get due process funds, court-authorized money to hire investigators, forensic experts, medical professionals, and mitigation specialists. A capable public defender can use those resources as well as any private attorney.

The best attorneys are honest about what it takes to do the job right. They do not sugarcoat the cost, and they will not promise the impossible when the foundation for real advocacy is missing. That honesty reflects their integrity and is also good strategy.

Chapter Seven

Closing Argument

When I started this book, I thought about including chapters on plea deals, what to expect after being charged with a serious crime, and how to help your attorney help you. Those topics are important and would fit in a longer book.

I decided to keep the focus on helping good people understand how to choose the right criminal defense attorney when the stakes are highest. Everything starts there. If you get that choice wrong, the plea decisions, strategies, and timelines that follow can go off track before you realize it.

Nothing substitutes for real courtroom experience: trying serious cases, arguing motions, negotiating from strength, and standing in front of juries when everything is on the line. General experience or years spent in an office are not enough.

Advertising, especially online, has made it easier than ever for attorneys to look impressive without being impressive. Flashy websites, high Google rankings, and curated reviews can hide a lack of trial

experience. It is easy to look battle-tested when no one checks the docket.

I wrote this book to give you the insight most people only get after making a mistake. I am not trying to scare you.

Hire a lawyer and a firm that put the courtroom first and the business second. Look for lawyers who earned their reputation in courtrooms, not marketing meetings, and who build their teams around that experience instead of around volume. Look for people who will tell you the truth instead of what you want to hear.

Do not fall for the plated fool's gold of desperation marketing, and do not mistake visibility for credibility.

Above all, do not let anyone's confidence or charisma distract you from the one question that matters: Will the people defending me stand next to me in court and fight as if it were a family member's life on the line?

When you find them, you will know. I hope this book helps you get there.

Epilogue

When It Matters Most

Thank you for reading this book.

If you have read this far, you are probably facing one of the hardest moments of your life or walking beside someone who is. You have already done what most people skip: you have tried to understand the situation before making a decision that could change everything.

I did not write this book for lawyers, and some in the legal community may not like what it says. I meant it to challenge the status quo. I wrote it for people who are scared, confused, angry, and overwhelmed by a system that can feel too big and too fast to fight.

You do not have to go into that system blind.

I hope these chapters have cut through the noise and given you tools, perspective, and confidence in finding the right attorney and in trusting your own judgment.

You do not need all the answers. You need to ask the right questions, stand your ground, and find

someone who knows how to stand with you. When it matters most, that makes all the difference.

Selected Reviews of The Brancato Law Firm, P.A.

Tampa, Florida

Reviews appear as their authors posted them, except for clarifications in brackets. English translations are the firm's. Reviewer names are shortened for privacy.

Clients of Jean-Luc Adrien

★★★★★

[Jean-Luc] is absolutely amazing! From day one, he has gone above and beyond. He has talked me off the ledge during some of the most stressful moments, always knowing exactly what to say to bring me peace of mind. When it comes to defending his clients, [Jean-Luc] gives 100% and never backs down. He knows when to play his ace card, and when he does, he delivers! Trust me !

Amanda G.

★★★★★

Brancato Law Firm is hands down the BEST Firm in the Tampa Bay area! The move swift and fast with professionalism. I would HIGHLY RECOMMEND them to support you and your judicial needs. Jean-

Luc is a GREAT attorney and would request his service if in need!

Anthony J.

★★★★★
Great law firm, Jean-Luc Adrien really help reduce my case and get the results i was looking for. Would definitely recommend!

Ricardo J.

★★★★★
Jean-luc Adrien es un excelente abogado me ayudó mucho en mi proceso y lo recomiendo.

(Jean-Luc Adrien is an excellent lawyer. He helped me a lot in my case, and I recommend him.)

Stiven P.

★★★★★
Jean-Luc is a Great lawyer to put your trust into

Darrin L.

Clients of Rocky Brancato

★★★★★
Rocky is the best lawyer. He believed in me when no one else did. He fought hard, and did not stop working until he found the evidence we needed to

win my case and clear my name. When he took on my case, it had been already ongoing for quite some time, many other lawyers turned me away due to it being "too late in the case." I was seeking other counsel after being told by my previous attorney "you have a 50/50 chance of going to jail on the day of trial" based on the limited evidence she had dug up at that time (for something I did not do). I was told that "nothing else can be done." Rocky was able to see in between the lines, and took me on when no one else would. He went above and beyond with effort, dug up the evidence my other lawyer told me was a "waste of time and not going to work," and truly saved my future from a horrible wrongful arrest situation. He was consistently responsive and communicative throughout the entire process. He always responded to my texts, emails, and calls right away. If you are looking for an attorney that will hear you, support you every step of the way, make time for you, and will take a consultative approach, Rocky is 100% your guy. He is a family man that actually cares - this is extremely hard to come by these days. I highly recommend Rocky Brancato to anyone in need of an attorney.

Molly G.

★★★★★

I had an excellent experience working with Rocky Brancato during an extremely stressful and sensitive situation involving false allegations. From the very beginning, Rocky provided clear, sound advice and took the time to truly listen to all of my concerns without ever interrupting or rushing me. His responsiveness was outstanding — whenever I reached out, his replies were fast, thoughtful, and reassuring. He consistently followed up on matters and kept me informed every step of the way, which made a difficult situation far more manageable. Overall, this was a great experience with a professional who genuinely cares about his clients and does exactly what he says he will do. I sincerely hope I never need a criminal defense attorney again, but if I ever do, I would absolutely trust Rocky Brancato without hesitation.

David E.

★★★★★

Rocky Brancato is diligent, trustworthy, with an extraordinary human and professional quality, a gift for people and integrity. All these virtues make him an invaluable attorney. Rocky Brancato has been with our family since day one of this stressful, unfair, and overwhelming legal matter. His compassion and

empathy are remarkable, and he puts all his criminal legal experience with genuine care at your service. He has gone beyond in our case, being at our side in every single stage, no matter the time or place, Rocky Brancato is there. He explains to you every step he will take before it even happens showing control and confidence in his legal defense strategy. If something comes up immediately Rocky Brancato has a plan B, always looking for the best legal outcome for you. Thanks to his hard work our family member keeps his freedom and his constitutional rights. In the courtroom and beyond, his presence has been a tower of strength and a beacon of hope for our family. I highly recommend Rocky Brancato to anyone in need of an experienced, knowledgeable, affordable, compassionate criminal defense attorney. Thank you from the deepest corners of our hearts. We are forever grateful.

Lein L.

★★★★★

Rocky Brancato was able to provide me with legal help that I didn't even imagine was possible. Because of his experience and knowledge he got me life changing results and that is no exaggeration. Rocky has an in depth knowledge of his field, decades of experience, and professionalism that is unmatched.

He was thorough, direct, and efficient as he fought for me. The best trait he has is that he always answers calls, texts, emails personally and promptly and I always felt like I was a priority. He changed my perception about lawyers and is truly a compassionate and understanding individual.

E. M.

★★★★★

He went over and beyond for me. He does not just handle small cases—I was facing a trafficking fentanyl charge for something I did not do, and Mr. Brancato got all of my charges dropped. He is a great attorney. He answered any questions I had at any time. Thank you so much. He is not just a great attorney. He has your best interest at heart.

Andrea

★★★★★

Mark my words, THIS IS THE BEST LAWYER

I have ever had the chance to meet, and it has been a pleasure and a major blessing to have him. I had a very difficult case, but in less than five business days, he took the weight of a planet off my shoulders. He goes above and beyond, and then does extra because he truly cares and is passionate about his work. I feel like I have my life back because of this guardian

angel. I hope any future clients reading this can feel the same. In my opinion, if you are going to take a chance, PLEASE—and I mean PLEASE—take it on this man.

Yian

★★★★★

I highly recommend Rocky! He was professional, knowledgeable, and always available to answer our questions. He worked hard on our case and helped us achieve a great outcome. A special thanks to his assistant as well—he was incredibly friendly, helpful, and treated us like family throughout the entire process. We are truly grateful to Rocky and his team for their support and dedication.

Akrm E.

★★★★★

I'm incredibly grateful for the help I received from this law firm. His knowledge and expertise were evident right away, and he handled everything in a timely and professional way. What stood out most to me was the way I was treated—with care, respect, and genuine decency throughout the entire process. That meant a lot during a difficult time. I would absolutely recommend him to anyone looking for a knowledgeable and compassionate attorney.

Kristen C.

★★★★★

Mr. Brancato not only proved his legal acumen, but he did so with genuine empathy and caring. I felt he was personally invested in my success and acted above and beyond my expectations. He kept me informed all steps of the process and was upfront and honest in our dealings. I highly recommend him.

Ixie

★★★★★

Mr. Brancato is a phenomenal and highly skilled attorney. He is extremely knowledgeable and has extensive trial experience. He is a very gifted attorney who fights for his clients and has the experience to effectively and successfully represent his clients. I would highly recommend him for anyone needing an attorney for themselves or their loved ones.

Maria

★★★★★

I was referred to another lawyer that best fit my case. They took the time to listen to me and made me feel like I mattered through this difficult time, not just another call not just another case. Thank you!

Lizeth C.

From Fellow Lawyers

★★★★★
An incredible trial lawyer, mentor, friend, and the guy you want in your corner when the stakes are at their highest and your liberty—or the liberty of your friends or family—is on the line.

Rory

Martindale-Hubbell peer review
Mr. Brancato is an amazing trial lawyer. He is passionate and skilled in all aspects. He is also a wonderful teacher. Many times i have sought out Mr. Brancato for advice and every time he has been quick to respond and patient in dealing with me. Mr. Brancato is a consummate professional.

Martindale-Hubbell peer review
Rocky has been a long time public defender in Hillsborough County. He is in a supervisory / training capacity and is instrumental in mentoring young attorneys in their office. I think he is a very fine, dedicated public servant who is most deserving of an AV-Rating.

Martindale-Hubbell peer review
Rocky is a very strong courtroom leader and a huge resource to other lawyers in the courthouse.

Learn More

To learn more about our firm, visit www.brancatolawfirm.com.

To set up a free consultation, call 813-727-7159. We are available 24/7, and consultations are available in person or by video. Se habla español.

Our office is two blocks from the courthouse at 620 E. Twiggs Street, Suite 205, Tampa, FL 33602. We serve clients throughout Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Pasco Counties.

Whether you are facing a serious charge or just want to understand your situation, we can help, with no pressure and no assumptions. Our firm knows what is at stake and what it takes to defend it.

Workbook

Knowing how to choose the right attorney is one thing. Doing it under pressure is another.

This workbook turns the lessons from this book into action steps. Use it to organize your interviews, compare your options, and base your decision on preparation instead of fear.

Attorney Interview #1

Name of Attorney:

_____

Name of Law Firm:

_____

Date of Interview:

_____

Who Will Handle Your Case

Which attorneys will work on my case, and what will each of them do?

_____

_____

Who is the most experienced trial lawyer involved in my case, and what is that lawyer's role?

_____

_____

Will an experienced trial lawyer take depositions, argue motions, and try the case, or directly supervise the attorney who does?

_____ Yes _____ No

Will the attorneys assigned to my case be named in my engagement agreement?

_____ Yes _____ No

Can I meet the attorneys who will handle my case?

_____ Yes _____ No

Trial Experience

How many jury trials have the attorneys on my case handled? _____

How many jury trials has the most experienced attorney on my case personally handled? _____

What types of cases were they?

_____

_____

Has any attorney on my case been named to the Super Lawyers or Rising Stars list? Which list and year?

_____

Have the attorneys on my case handled cases similar to mine?

_____ Yes _____ No

Can you provide locations and case numbers of relevant past jury trials?

_____ Yes _____ No

Strategic Approach

How do you approach serious cases like mine?

_____

_____

Who sets the strategy in my case, and how often is my case reviewed?

_____

_____

Will you prepare for trial from day one?

_____ Yes _____ No

If charges have not been filed yet, will you contact the prosecutor before the filing decision?

_____ Yes _____ No

How does your firm review discovery, such as video, phone extractions, and large sets of records?

_____

_____

Use of Experts

Do you plan to use expert witnesses in my case?

_____ Yes _____ No

Fee Structure

What is your quoted total fee?

_____

Does the fee include trial representation?

_____ Yes _____ No

What additional costs do you estimate beyond your fee (experts, court reporters, travel, etc.)?

_____

_____

Gut Check and Overall Notes

How did I feel after meeting with the attorneys? Informed, pressured, respected?

_____

_____

_____

Do I feel these are people I could trust with my future?

_____ Yes _____ No

Notes:

_____

_____

Attorney Interview #2

Name of Attorney:

_____

Name of Law Firm:

_____

Date of Interview:

_____

Who Will Handle Your Case

Which attorneys will work on my case, and what will each of them do?

_____

_____

Who is the most experienced trial lawyer involved in my case, and what is that lawyer's role?

_____

_____

Will an experienced trial lawyer take depositions, argue motions, and try the case, or directly supervise the attorney who does?

_____ Yes _____ No

Will the attorneys assigned to my case be named in my engagement agreement?

_____ Yes _____ No

Can I meet the attorneys who will handle my case?

_____ Yes _____ No

Trial Experience

How many jury trials have the attorneys on my case handled? _____

How many jury trials has the most experienced attorney on my case personally handled? _____

What types of cases were they?

_____

_____

Has any attorney on my case been named to the Super Lawyers or Rising Stars list? Which list and year?

_____

Have the attorneys on my case handled cases similar to mine?

_____ Yes _____ No

Can you provide locations and case numbers of relevant past jury trials?

_____ Yes _____ No

Strategic Approach

How do you approach serious cases like mine?

_____

_____

Who sets the strategy in my case, and how often is my case reviewed?

_____

_____

Will you prepare for trial from day one?

_____ Yes _____ No

If charges have not been filed yet, will you contact the prosecutor before the filing decision?

_____ Yes _____ No

How does your firm review discovery, such as video, phone extractions, and large sets of records?

_____

_____

Use of Experts

Do you plan to use expert witnesses in my case?

_____ Yes _____ No

Fee Structure

What is your quoted total fee?

_____

Does the fee include trial representation?

_____ Yes _____ No

What additional costs do you estimate beyond your fee (experts, court reporters, travel, etc.)?

_____

_____

Gut Check and Overall Notes

How did I feel after meeting with the attorneys? Informed, pressured, respected?

_____

_____

_____

Do I feel these are people I could trust with my future?

_____ Yes _____ No

Notes:

_____

_____

Attorney Interview #3

Name of Attorney:

_____

Name of Law Firm:

_____

Date of Interview:

_____

Who Will Handle Your Case

Which attorneys will work on my case, and what will each of them do?

_____

_____

Who is the most experienced trial lawyer involved in my case, and what is that lawyer's role?

_____

_____

Will an experienced trial lawyer take depositions, argue motions, and try the case, or directly supervise the attorney who does?

_____ Yes _____ No

Will the attorneys assigned to my case be named in my engagement agreement?

_____ Yes _____ No

Can I meet the attorneys who will handle my case?

_____ Yes _____ No

Trial Experience

How many jury trials have the attorneys on my case handled? _____

How many jury trials has the most experienced attorney on my case personally handled? _____

What types of cases were they?

_____

_____

Has any attorney on my case been named to the Super Lawyers or Rising Stars list? Which list and year?

_____

Have the attorneys on my case handled cases similar to mine?

_____ Yes _____ No

Can you provide locations and case numbers of relevant past jury trials?

_____ Yes _____ No

Strategic Approach

How do you approach serious cases like mine?

_____

_____

Who sets the strategy in my case, and how often is my case reviewed?

_____

_____

Will you prepare for trial from day one?

_____ Yes _____ No

If charges have not been filed yet, will you contact the prosecutor before the filing decision?

_____ Yes _____ No

How does your firm review discovery, such as video, phone extractions, and large sets of records?

_____

_____

Use of Experts

Do you plan to use expert witnesses in my case?

_____ Yes _____ No

Fee Structure

What is your quoted total fee?

_____

Does the fee include trial representation?

_____ Yes _____ No

What additional costs do you estimate beyond your fee (experts, court reporters, travel, etc.)?

_____

_____

Gut Check and Overall Notes

How did I feel after meeting with the attorneys? Informed, pressured, respected?

_____

_____

_____

Do I feel these are people I could trust with my future?

_____ Yes _____ No

Notes:

_____

_____

Final Comparison Chart

Use this chart to compare the attorneys and firms you interviewed side by side, based on the most important criteria.

Criteria	Attorney 1	Attorney 2	Attorney 3
Name of Attorney			
Name of Firm			
Attorneys Assigned to My Case			
Most Experienced Trial Lawyer and Role			
Experienced Trial Lawyer Handles or Supervises Depositions, Motions, and Trial (Yes/No)			
Attorneys Named in Agreement (Yes/No)			
Met the Attorneys Who Will Handle My Case (Yes/No)			
Jury Trials Handled (Team / Most Experienced)			

Criteria	Attorney 1	Attorney 2	Attorney 3
Types of Cases Tried			
Super Lawyers or Rising Stars (List and Year)			
Has Handled Similar Cases (Yes/No)			
Provided Locations and Case Numbers for Past Trials (Yes/No)			
Strategic Approach (Summary Notes)			
Who Sets Strategy / How Often Case Is Reviewed			
Prepares for Trial from Day One (Yes/No)			
Will Contact Prosecutor Before Filing (Yes/No)			
How Firm Reviews Discovery			
Plans to Use Expert Witnesses (Yes/No)			
Total Fee Quoted			

Criteria	Attorney 1	Attorney 2	Attorney 3
Trial Representation Included in Fee (Yes/No)			
Estimated Additional Costs (Experts, Court Reporters, Travel)			
Gut Feeling After Meeting			
Would Trust These Attorneys with My Future (Yes/No)			

When everything is on the line, the lawyer you hire matters more than anything else.

Every year, people facing murder, sexual battery, and child abuse charges hire a lawyer from an online ad and learn too late that the face in the advertisement never touches their file. In this second edition, Tampa trial attorney Rocky Brancato shows you how to tell a real major crimes attorney from a marketing operation before you sign anything.

Inside you will learn:

- The red flags that show up in the very first phone call
- The questions that reveal who will actually handle your case
- How to read ratings, reviews, and fees without being fooled
- Why acting before charges are filed can keep a case from ever being filed
- How to compare attorneys side by side with the included workbook

Rocky Brancato has defended people charged with Florida's most serious crimes for more than 25 years and has handled thousands of felony cases. He served as Chief Operations Officer of the Hillsborough County Public Defender's Office, overseeing a staff of over 100 attorneys, and as its training director he trained hundreds of Tampa Bay lawyers. He holds an AV Preeminent rating from Martindale-Hubbell and has been named to the Florida Super Lawyers list. He founded The Brancato Law Firm, P.A. in Tampa.



Facing a serious charge in Tampa Bay? Free consultation, 24/7.
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