



Attorney and Industry Credibility: How Partnership Is a Two-Way Street

I'm sure we've all heard the "jokes" and derogatory comments about attorneys. They can be really obnoxious – but do some of them have a point? Just because someone has "J.D." after their name doesn't mean we can draw any conclusions about the quality of his or her work.

That's why at ARAG, we have processes in place to ensure we are working with and supporting credible attorneys. This not only benefits our plan members, who can rest easy knowing they're working with quality attorneys who can help them address and resolve their legal matters, but it also benefits attorneys. The more we can create great attorney-client experiences, the more attorneys will be respected, valued and used by the general public. This is particularly important when you consider that many conversations about the future of the legal industry and changes in the legal profession focus a lot on non-lawyer solutions. But at ARAG, we believe that quality attorneys are a key part of the solution.

So how do we measure an attorney's credibility?

First, we have requirements that each individual attorney must meet before he or she is invited to join our network. A key phrase here is "each individual attorney": some legal insurance companies or legal plan providers will verify credentials for one attorney in a firm but then approve all attorneys in that firm to be on their network, without doing background checks on the other attorneys. Generally this means the senior-most, experienced attorney is used to join the network, but other attorneys end up working with all the legal plan clients.

At ARAG, we require that each attorney on our network:

- Is licensed to practice and in good standing with the regulatory authority in the state(s) where he or she accepts clients.
- Maintains physical office space in the state(s) where he or she is licensed and practicing law.
- Maintains malpractice insurance coverage of at least \$100,000 per incident and \$300,000 aggregate per year.

If those requirements are met, a member of the ARAG Attorney Relations team calls every attorney that

applies before they are accepted to make sure the attorney completely understands and agrees to all expectations and is prepared to work with ARAG plan members.

We also re-credential every single one of our attorneys on an annual basis.

We check to make sure there have been no disciplinary actions brought against them with their state bar and verify that they are in good standing, active and still practicing in the areas of law they listed on their initial ARAG application. We also survey each plan member to ask them about their customer service experience. Comments are shared with the attorneys to highlight areas where they excel and areas where there may be room for improvement.

Some other legal plan providers don't do any of these things, which could lead to people working with lawyers who aren't practicing or aren't in good standing. This leads to horrible experiences for the client — not to



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mention it makes a bad name for the other attorneys on the network, as members who have one bad experience with an attorney tend to paint them all in that group with the same brush.

At ARAG, attorneys aren't just providers - they are partners.

Our partnerships are the key to building credibility. How can a company know of the credibility of its attorneys if they are just faceless names in a long list? ARAG invests a lot of time and resources into engaging with attorneys, because we know our shared mission of bringing legal services to all Americans will only happen with a strong, successful partnership.

We partner with attorneys to create our DIY Docs® and other educational resources we provide members, including our guidebooks. We have an attorney advisory board, which meets regularly to counsel ARAG on business decisions that will affect attorneys, such as coverage and fee schedule changes. We have attorney committees on media, content and technology that harness attorneys' expertise and passion in these areas to help us improve our services for attorneys and plan members.

We also spend a good portion of our time serving on boards and committees for organizations such as Group Legal Services Association, American Bar Association, Association of Corporate Counsel and the Iowa Access to Justice Commission that will help us advocate for attorneys and keep our finger on the pulse of legal industry changes.

In addition, we take the time to go out and meet attorneys around the country to hear firsthand what's working and what isn't – on our network and in the legal industry. We host CLEs for ARAG attorneys because we understand the importance of continuing education, and we sponsor and attend dozens of national, state and local bar association meetings a year – to talk with attorneys and to support attorneys during this time of many changes happening in the legal field.

Interested in becoming an ARAG Network Attorney? Visit ARAGlegal.com/attorneys for more information.



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About the Author

Nicolle Schippers is the Associate General Counsel and Legal Industry Advocate at ARAG. Nicolle received her Bachelor's degree in journalism and mass communication from Iowa State University, and attended Drake University Law School in Des Moines where she received her Juris Doctorate degree.

Nicolle serves on the Group Legal Services Association (GLSA) Board, the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) Board of Directors (ACC), the Iowa State Bar Association (ISBA) Board of Governors, and the Board of Directors for the ISBA Public Service Project Board of Directors, the ACC Iowa Chapter, and the Polk County Bar Association. She is chair of the ISBA Corporate Counsel Section and a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and the ISBA Foundation. Nicolle is a published novelist and author whose work has been featured in legal publications such as the ACC Docket and Law Practice Today.



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