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FINDING A REPRESENTATIVE (VSO)

When visiting various veteran websites, I have come across a common question,

"How do I find a good VSO?"

Well, that is a question that is hard to answer.

There is no set group of questions to interview one to decide if he/she is savvy, committed and TRAINED.

However, after broaching this very question on a few websites, I did get some common-sense suggestions for trying to evaluate if the VSO individually or the organization at your location of choice is going to be of help to you. I will list them here, in no particular order, so that you may study and perhaps find some you can then utilize when beginning this search.

- **First, BEFORE you start your search for a VSO, decide just how involved you want to be.**

If you intend to do a lot of the work yourself with the VSO acting as the go between, then you will need to look for someone who will cooperate.

If you are unable to work any part of your claim and need your VSO to take it from soup to nuts, again you will need to look for someone competent, organized, and willing to take on the entire process. This will be someone who will also need to be willing to take it into the appeal process as necessary.

- The following are suggestions from veterans. They were kind enough to offer their aid as I requested. **I thank them.** I am leaving their names and the websites out to protect their privacy.
 - **Talk to veterans**, especially veterans you trust. Ask them about their experiences with VSO's and/or organizations.
 - **Go to a canteen at a VA Medical Center** or go to a veteran center and ask if anyone has some names that could be recommended.
 - **Go on veteran websites** (See Support Groups in STEP 6) and ask for anyone's experiences with a VSO or organization in a specific area. This would be an avenue where you would receive a frank answer to questions you might have since the member of the website is usually anonymous.
 - **Assess a VSO's characteristics:**

When meeting with the VSO, do you feel your meeting is being crammed into a small amount of time with not enough allowed to complete your queries? Or does the VSO have the patience and provides you with the time necessary to explore your concerns.

Is he/she getting sidetracked while talking with you or does the VSO give you his undivided attention?

Does the VSO exhibit confidence?

Does he/she seem genuinely interested in your claim(s)?

If you phone the VSO, is your call returned within a reasonable amount of time?

Does he/she show competence in the performance of the job?

How do you feel working with this person---comfortable, intimidated, encouraged, patronized?
Depending on your response you need to decide if you want to continue with this VSO.

- Another possibility is to **go in to a VSO office just before it closes**. Even if they don't have the time then to discuss your situation, setting up an appointment for another mutually agreed time could offer insight into the office. How are you treated, courteous with interest in helping you or in a hurry to just move you out the door?

- Sometimes you have no real choice in the matter. Remember, though, you may have signed a Power of Attorney (POA) with that VSO or organization but you can always rescind it and take the claim process over yourself or designate another VSO somewhere else to handle your claim by signing a new POA.

- Finally, if your VSO fails to give you the guidance you need, not to mention time to converse, respect and courteous service you deserve, then keep in mind there are other VSO's out there. Do not worry about hurt feelings on the VSO's part. They are there to help you! If they fail to do that, then you need to transfer to someone who can help.
Hopefully, this information will help a little. As I said at the beginning there is no set group of questions or actions that can guarantee a good VSO. There are a lot of variables in this complex area.