



Legal Tips

Joel W. Collins, Jr., Esquire

Joel Collins is a founding partner of Collins & Lacy, P.A. He focuses his practice on civil litigation and white-collar criminal defense. Collins served four years in the Judge Advocate General's Corps of the United States Army and was an assistant professor of law at the United States Military Academy, West Point, NY. After two years with a Frankfurt, Germany, law firm, Collins was appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of South Carolina. In 1982, he established his own firm, which is now Collins & Lacy. Collins received the Jeter E. Rhodes, Jr. Trial Lawyer of the Year Award in 2002 from the South Carolina Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates. He is the Southeastern Regional Vice President of Primerus.



Primerus is the lawyer's equivalent of the Hippocratic oath. Law firms with the Primerus seal have met and upheld the society's rigorous standards of quality and ethics. The seal recognizes the law firm's integrity and commitment to excellence in service to clients.

When Choosing an Attorney, Look for the Quality Seal: Primerus

When someone wants to buy tickets for a Broadway play, he or she looks at *Variety* magazine, reads the reviews and makes a choice with confidence.

When someone is traveling and wants to find an outstanding restaurant, he or she looks at the *Michelin Guide*, trusts their insight and makes a choice with confidence.

When buying things for the house, someone can check *Consumer Reports*, trust their insight and make their choice with confidence.

I give these examples because all of us look for standards of quality upon which to base our decisions and selections. Knowing that certain standards have been met allows us to trust our selection. Standards tell us we won't be surprised by poor quality and that others have traveled the same path and been satisfied. I put great stock in such standards.

For this very reason, when I learned of the International Society of Primerus Law Firms, an organization that recognizes law firms committed to the highest ideals of the legal profession, I made a commitment that Collins & Lacy would earn and maintain this mark of quality.

The membership criteria are impressive. Only firms with the highest rating by *Martindale Hubbell* are eligible. Judges, other attorneys, the South Carolina Bar Association, our clients, and insurance companies were questioned about our firm, our reputation and our performance in and outside the courtroom. Based on their honest assessments and experience with our firm, Collins & Lacy passed the rigorous screening process and was named a Primerus law firm.

Today, the Primerus Seal is proudly displayed in our offices, on our web site and on various other documents bearing the firm's name.



ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Why is this important?

Because while I believe the practice of law is among the most honorable professions one can choose, and indeed, it is the very backbone of our society, it has recently come under fire and is on the verge of losing the respect and trust that are so critical. Shallow advertising, frivolous lawsuits, skeptical media, and an antagonistic political culture have created misperceptions about the legal profession. Instead of being viewed as peacemakers and leaders, a view I share, lawyers are increasingly seen as troublemakers and rabble-rousers.

The mission of Collins & Lacy as a Primerus law firm is to help restore the legal profession to its rightful place of honor, dignity, and trust in service to the community. There are six “pillars” Primerus firms are committed to uphold:

- 1. Integrity.** Research shows this is the number one quality people want in their lawyer. Legal matters are sensitive. Clients must be able to trust their attorneys completely.
- 2. Excellence of product work.** More than a matter of winning or losing a case, excellence is found in the total work product, whether it is drafting a settlement, making one’s case in court, keeping detailed records or communicating clearly with clients.
- 3. Reasonable fee structure.** Fees are fair, reasonable and consistent.

4. Professional Education. In addition to professional continuing education requirements, Collins & Lacy requires education on ethics and other aspects of professional conduct.

5. Civility to bench and bar. Our courts are a sacred place. It’s where we resolve differences peacefully and with dignity. Court officers, judges and lawyers deserve our respect, even when we disagree. We pledge civility at all turns.

6. Community Service. The law exists to hold communities together. As a Primerus law firm, Collins & Lacy is committed to endeavors that benefit our community, including pro bono services for those who cannot afford legal counsel.

Choosing a law firm is not always easy, but it is my hope people will see the Primerus Seal in conjunction with our name and understand the significance. I want clients to know they can place their complete trust in our ability to represent them in cases that affect their lives, their businesses and their reputations. I want them to value our reputation. I want them to know we will conduct ourselves with the utmost civility and professionalism on their behalf. I want them to understand we are fair and reasonable in our fees.

At the end of the day, the Primerus Seal is our promise that we will meet all client expectations for excellence in the practice of law.

