

# section news

## SOLO AND SMALL PRACTICE

### WELCOME TO SMALL PRACTICE

BY KOREN BOYD, ESQ., SOLO AND SMALL PRACTICE SECTION CHAIR

If you ask a group of solo practitioners why they chose to go out on their own you will get a mix of responses. Many want to spend more time with their kids, some have dreams of building a mega firm and some just want to litigate without having senior partners steal their cases the day before trial. However they put it, they are saying essentially the same thing: We want to control our own destinies.

When you manage your own firm, you choose your own cases as well as how much and when you work. You can avoid practice areas you hate and will never be sent to court to handle someone else's case you know nothing about. And, you will bear responsibility only for the errors you make rather than sharing the burden of those made by others in your firm.

As it turns out, controlling your own destiny is as challenging as it is rewarding. Running a small practice comes with a unique set of problems. You are practicing law *and* running a small business. If you have no employees, you shoulder the time-consuming work typically handled by secretaries and paralegals at a larger firm. If you have employees, then you have the added task of managing workers. To top it off, you will do all of this without the resources of a larger firm.

We started the Solo and Small Practice Section to help attorneys overcome the hurdles of small firm life. Most of us didn't go to law school to run a business; we went to be lawyers. It's easy to find the law on an unfamiliar issue. It's much harder to find reliable staff or to decide where to spend your marketing dollars. If you are already running your own firm, you have likely faced these and other issues. And, no doubt, at some point you have not known who to go to for advice. We set up the Solo and Small Practice Section to make all of this a little easier. We learn from each other, sharing resources, ideas and war stories.

#### Considering Hanging a Shingle?

The Solo and Small Practice Section doesn't just exist for those who are already in small practice. An increasing number of attorneys are considering hanging their own shingles. If you are toying with the idea of starting a practice, there are a few questions you have to ask yourself.

#### *Are you brave?*

When I started on my own I got sick of people telling me how "brave" I was, but I soon came to realize that starting a practice *is* brave. It's hard to walk away from the steady paycheck and delegated work into a world where every decision you make affects your destiny. If you are new to law practice, it's hard to dive in for the first time alone. When you tell people you are starting a practice, you will get negative reactions. You

will get positive ones as well, but even those will come with a wary, "I could never do that." It takes a certain kind of person to continue on through all that. You need to know if you're that kind of person.

#### *Why?*

Why do you want to start your own practice? You need to have a reason, because building a practice from scratch is hard work and there may be times when going to work for a firm will seem easier. If you are going to stick with it, you need a reason to keep you motivated. Most people who make the decision to strike out alone already have a reason. But those considering solo practice simply because there is no work to be found or their firm is downsizing and they see the writing on the wall, may have to work to find a reason to *want* to be solo. Don't break yourself in half trying to find a reason if you don't really have one. Some people will never be happy as their own boss and if you are one of those people don't force yourself to go solo. But if you have a reason and the drive to be a pioneer, seize the opportunity.

#### *Can I afford it?*

You are not going to put a sign on your door and start raking in money the next day. You need to have a way to pay the bills until the cash starts coming in. Some people leave their firms with a book of business. Some people start fresh out of law school. But everyone is going to face financial challenges they wouldn't as employees at a firm. Depending on your practice area, you could go months or even a year without income, but the cost of running a practice isn't as high as you might think. You *can* afford it, but you will need to plan ahead.

#### **You are not alone**

Brave though starting out may be, you will not be the first person to do it. Every law firm out there exists because, at some point, someone decided to take control of their own destiny. Reach out to those who have gone before you and ask for advice. So, whether you are thinking of going out on your own or are already out there and just need a compass now and again, the Solo and Small Practice Section is a good place to start. ■



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