



Marketing, Managing and Growing a Profitable Law Firm

6 Toxic Personalities No Law Firm Should Employ

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Running a law firm depends largely on legal assistants and non-lawyer staff members. This includes virtual assistants as well as those who sit in your physical space. These are the people who running a law firm easier – they interact with clients, handle the workflow in your office, and in many cases function as the face of your firm.

When I was younger (damn, I sound older than my 40 years) I was running a law firm with a pretty decent-sized staff. We handled bankruptcy, real estate and personal injury work in the firm, and the hive was always buzzing with activity. From time to time I would get an employee who just wasn't working out. Unfortunately, that realization often came after I was reliant upon that staff member to perform a certain job function. At the time I was concentrating more on running a law firm than managing my staff (a mistake in hindsight, I know – but with experience comes wisdom).

Firing people became more difficult as time went on because I was, in a very real way, being held hostage by my employees. They knew stuff I didn't, had personal relationships with key players that transcended my own, and did things I either did not want to or could not do for lack of time. In other words, it was they who were running my law firm rather than me. When I ultimately ended the employment relationship it was difficult, time-consuming, and painful for the office.

I'm not going to talk about effective management and delegation when running a law firm; that's for another day. But I did realize that it would have been far easier for the office had I spotted the problem personalities earlier on in the employment relationship.

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Who you hire and keep on board is important. And making the right hiring decision is mission critical to successfully running your law firm.

There are some personality types who you want to get rid of as fast as possible, lest your practice be hamstrung. Here are the 6 people you need to look out for - and run from as fast as your feet can take you:

1. **The Clock Watcher:** He or she comes in promptly, unpacks, goes to the restroom, turns on the computer and begins work. By the time work starts, however, it's 30 minutes into the work day. At the end of the day, the employee starts packing up in time to get out the door precisely on time.
2. **The "Not Me" Ghost:** When I was a kid my mom would ask who had done something particularly wrong. My response was always the same - "Not me." It would have been an easier sell had I not been (and remain) an only child. If your employee doesn't take ownership of their responsibilities by having a full and clear understanding of how it all fits into the big picture, you need to cut bait.
3. **The Passive Listener:** It's one thing to listen intently, it's yet another thing to fail to ask questions. When a task must be done, your employee needs to understand every single aspect. If there's any way that stone may remain unturned, questions clarify the issues before problems arise. If your employee isn't asking questions, they can't possibly be able to handle every aspect of the task at hand.
4. **The Avoider:** The telephone remains the primary means of communication for many. If your employee doesn't like to answer their phone or return phone calls, you need to move on as quickly as possible.
5. **The Groaner:** Looks, we all complain about bad clients, grumpy opposing counsel and unhelpful bureaucrats. It's part of life, and of the office. But if you've got someone who's regularly bellyaching about how all the clients/opposing counsel/court clerks/whatever are idiots then you've got an employee who's standing in the way of maintaining excellent relations with the outside world. These are people you rely on to keep your office functioning, after all; being negative towards them is going to cost you money and time.
6. **The "Yes" Person:** You're not always right. In fact, you're probably dead wrong sometimes. Sorry to burst your bubble. A good employee is going to stand up to you when you're wrong, make suggestions to improve the office, and actively seek ways

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to make the client experience a better one. If you wanted your ego stroked, you should have stayed at home in front of your mirror and did your best [Stuart Smalley](#) impression.

What other sorts of bad employee types have you run into in your practice?

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