

A day in the life of.....a young lawyer solo practitioner.

I woke up one day, and I was a lawyer. Well, all of you know it did not happen over night, and I, too, had to endure three years of law school, and the Bar exam. All of a sudden, those milestones in the life of every attorney were a thing of the past. I was now lawyer...one with a plan. After taking a good look at the job market, after being offered a position that was later revoked due to the recession, I did what most people define as courageous, bold, and fearless. I opened my own law firm, straight out of law school. To me, it was not about courage, it was about having no other choice. Certainly, you must have some courage, and be a bit of a risk taker, but once you start, you quickly notice how many courageous attorneys there are.

So, I plunged into the unknown. I obtained an office, I secured business cards and a website. I had read books about being a solo practitioner, so I wrote out my business plan, discovered accounting tools, marketing strategies, and even the best practices when talking with clients. I was ready, and clients' calls began to reach me. After a couple of weeks of panic, running around to get answers, understanding the system and the procedures, my practice is finally taking shape.

When you begin your own firm, you can only imagine how you will handle calls, clients, cases, filing, and secretarial duties. It is only when you have actual clients, that your business becomes a reality, and you begin to realize that flexibility is a key to your success. You constantly have to rethink your methods, strategies, and approaches, and adapt them to your daily legal practice. You must not fear trial and error because they contribute to a stronger business. You must always allow room for improvement, especially when the suggestions come from more experienced attorneys. So now, when I wake up, not only I am a lawyer, but also I am a lawyer who is better prepared based on the mistakes and learning from the previous day.

There is also another piece of the puzzle when it comes to opening your own law firm, and that is *patience*. I am not a patient person, mostly because I am constantly driven by wanting to accomplish the goals I set for myself. But a solo practitioner must learn patience. It is probably the biggest challenge because you may not have the number of cases you wished for, or the amount of income you predicted. Patience is also important when you begin your day without a full work schedule. You must remind yourself that your career is not a sprint but a marathon, and that your dreams, hopes and achievements will follow. However, you cannot waste your time commiserating and wondering whether your decision to open your firm was a wise one. A solo practitioner must always be ready to meet colleagues, ready to network (a lot!), participate in committees, Bar Associations activities, and many other events that could generate clients. Remember, patience does not equal monotony.

Lastly, I learned two additional lessons in the three months I have been opened for business. The first lesson is that to be a solo practitioner is hard work. The business aspect of it can be intimidating as you wear multiple hats, i.e. attorney, accountant, marketing director, advertiser etc. However, feeling competent and prepared to give legal advice is even more challenging than designing a website or business cards. Sometimes it feels like the first day of law school, where you are presented with legal questions and you have no answers. So, you research for hours to become a prepared attorney. But on the other side, there is lesson number two. In these past three months, I have learned that although I am a solo practitioner, I am surrounded by colleagues who have given me encouragement, advice, business management tips, and answers to my questions. Even more importantly, they have all repeated to me that my

decision to open my own law firm was a wise one, and that I will soon collect the fruits of my labor.

If you are thinking about opening your own law firm, I say go for it. There are going to be challenges and obstacles, however, the freedom to shape your career and your quality of life will make your efforts worthwhile.

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