

STARTING A LAW FIRM- YOU CAN DO IT!

By Rachel A. Sabo

If you are considering starting your own law firm, ask yourself two questions. Am I willing to work hard? Can I ask for help? If the answer is yes to both, read on.

When you begin telling people you are going to start your own firm, you will probably get one of two reactions. Some people will be genuinely excited for you. Others will think you are crazy.

Do not pay attention to the latter because chances are they have never done what you are about to do. Be brave. I did it and so can you.

First, start planning. Create a business plan. Have others read it, critique it and offer suggestions. Read books on the topic, like “Solo by Choice” by Carolyn Elefant. Try to build up a little nest egg before you start. If your work is contingency fee based work like mine, this is even more important. Network with attorneys (CBA committee meetings area great resource for this) who have their own practice and ask them for advice. A meeting like this is how I came to practice employment law and how I met my mentor.

My best piece of advice is that you will need help. You cannot do it alone. You need great mentors who are willing to guide you, teach you and support you. They will be invaluable to you during the first few years of your practice. Remember – they’ve all been where you are right now and chances are, someone helped them get there too.

I would recommend deciding what type of law you want to practice BEFORE you open the doors. It is helpful to have mentors who practice in the same area you do because they can provide you with sample documents, answer procedural questions, co-counsel cases with you, etc. Use your mentor as a resource but try to be as independent as possible. There is no

substitute for researching and learning things on your own.

Once you know what type of law you want to practice, turn to more practical matters like office space, your logo and your website. You want to have these things before you begin advertising and networking. While I was waiting on bar results, I asked friends to help me with things like this. For instance, I have a friend who dabbles in graphic design. I asked her if she would design our logo and her ideas were amazing. Best part? She did it for free. You will be surprised at how many people will jump at the chance to help you on your journey.

Next topic – office space. For someone just starting out who does not yet have clients, sharing space with other attorneys is great. Not only can you exchange ideas and ask for help if you need it, but space sharing arrangements are often more affordable than renting on your own. They also give you the option to share a conference room, fax machine/printer, phone system and other amenities without bearing the expense alone. Above all, try to keep your overhead very low. This will help relieve the pressure while you are building your business. You can also investigate the CBA inc and inc Limited programs and/or Legal Practice Lab) that provide practice development and management.

I recommend designing a website before you open your firm or before you begin advertising and networking. You want everyone to be able to navigate to your website and learn about you. Is this an expense? Absolutely. But completely worth it in the end based on the number of clients you will get from it, especially if you have great search engine optimization (SEO).

You do not need to hire someone to write the content for your website

in order to have great SEO. Research this online. There are hundreds of SEO tutorials on YouTube and other sites that will teach you everything you need to know about what content should be on your website to reach your target clientele. If you cannot afford to pay someone to do something, learn how to do it yourself. I write a blog for our website and it’s a great marketing tool. Plus, it’s free. Not only does it provide SEO for our site but potential clients learn from the articles I write.

Lastly, network. Network with other lawyers. Network with non-lawyers. Meeting people and getting involved in organizations will help you build your practice. This is my personal favorite, as I love to meet other people and I’m a friendly person by nature. Even if you are not, try to push yourself to get involved. Before you know it, networking will be second nature.

This is not even close to an exhaustive list but above all, remember that you CAN do this. Will you want to quit sometimes? Sure. Will you be frustrated because you feel you don’t know enough? Of course. But instead of letting this negative energy discourage you, channel it in a different way. Use legal research tools to research whatever issue you are unsure of. Read a book on the topic to learn more. There is no substitute for hard work – you just have to be willing to do it to be successful.



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