

Twenty helpful tips for starting your solo legal practice – Part I

The Fourth of July is near. It's a day to celebrate the nation's independence. Well, why not take this time to assert your own independence from the constraints of working for someone else. There is no time like the present to break away and start your own legal practice and this two-part post is going to provide some practical law office management tips for making the big jump.

1. **Funding your move** – As with any entrepreneurial venture, starting a law office requires money. Once you make the decision to transition into solo practice, it is vitally important to start saving and planning for expenses – both anticipated and unanticipated. Start a savings account or look into other funding options. If your credit score is good enough, you may want to consider a business loan. Perhaps a family member is willing to give you a loan. Think outside of the box for creative ways to fund your new endeavor.
2. **Make a plan** – Successful businesses start with a business plan. Make the effort to do your research and create a business plan. It will provide a roadmap for where you want your firm to go and how you will go about getting there. Starting your practice without a business plan is like walking through the forest with a blindfold. It may take some time, but the forethought and consideration that goes into a comprehensive business plan will benefit your practice in the long run.
3. **Handle your business** – Make sure you properly set up your business as required by the laws of your state. First determine what type of business entity you want to form. From a partnership to an LLC, there are numerous options to choose from when forming a business entity. Depending on your location, you may also have to register your business name or obtain a business license. Whatever your state requires, make sure you comply to protect yourself down the road.

4. **Finding space** – Now, it's time to decide where your law office will be located. Even after narrowing your options down to a city or town, you need to decide where you want to be located within that area. For example, downtown may be bustling and close to the courthouse, but rents are often higher in these coveted areas. If you are in a metropolitan city, you may also want to consider public transportation access. For a car dependent location, you want to think about parking availability. Office size is another consideration. Most law offices have a lobby, a conference area and individual office space at the least. Find a balance between affordable and professional, remembering that your office space sends a message to your clients. In recent years, many attorneys have chosen to save money by utilizing an office sharing agreement with other attorneys or choosing to work from a home office. These are both viable options that can save you money while meeting your office needs.
5. **Pick your practice areas** – You need to determine which practice areas you will serve. If you have already worked in a law office, you may want to choose practice areas where you have previous experience. It's also useful to do some research into the financial impact of each practice area you are considering. If you live in a high crime area, criminal law may be a cash cow for your new office. If you are in an area with a lot of real estate development, you may want to consider real estate or transactional law. You might also consider a general practice that handles various types of cases or a boutique firm with one highly specialized practice area. Whatever you choose, try to make it an area where you will have a lasting interest and consistent profit.
5. **Get insurance** – Don't forget your malpractice insurance. It's generally a requirement and highly recommended for your protection. If you're not sure where to turn, most state bars have resources to help you choose the right coverage and policy for your firm.
6. **Staffing needs** – It's time to consider your staffing needs. Do you need a legal secretary or paralegal? Do you want a full time administrative assistant, or do you think part time help would be sufficient? Think about your resources because you have to pay your staff. You should also consider tax requirements and benefits, such as health insurance. If these necessities give you a headache, consider contracting a

paralegal to assist you on an as-needed basis. You can benefit from a highly experienced professional without all of the financial burdens.

7. **Management programs** – Law firms are businesses and businesses must be managed. For some attorneys, an office manager or supervisor is the key to proper management of their practice. For others, an effective law firm management software helps them stay organized and get things done.
8. **Time tracking** – In addition to your law firm management, you need to select a legal time tracking and billing software to assist you with keeping track of client tasks and billing accurately for your services. TimeSolv is an excellent cloud-based software that provides you with time tracking and billing capabilities you will not find anywhere else. Click [here](#) for a no-obligation 30 -day trial.
9. Get the word out – Your marketing efforts should start before you even open your office doors. How will potential clients find you without a comprehensive marketing plan? If you aren't sure where to start, there are plenty of law firm marketing agencies to help you get started. A more affordable option is to get on the internet. It's filled with articles and information about law practice marketing, so do your research.

There it is – 10 useful tips for starting your solo legal practice. Part II of this series will be packed with 10 more useful tips, mostly aimed at helping you through the initial growing pains of starting your own practice. In the meantime, declare your independence and hang that shingle!

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, The Legal Writing Studio, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.