



Building a Sustainable Solo Practice

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Set yourself up for success with the support you need. In this guidebook, *Building a Sustainable Community-Based Solo Law Practice*, Maria Hall and Micheli Quadros lay out some of the things to consider before starting your own law firm.

BEFORE GOING SOLO

➤ 6 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Going Solo

- 1. What do you want for your practice?
- 2. Do you have a strong vision of who you are?
- 3. What types of clients do you want to serve?
- 4. What types of cases do you want to work on?
What types of cases are you passionate about?
- 5. Are you self-directed and disciplined?
- 6. Are you risk-tolerant?



6 Tips to Help Jump-Start Your Confidence and Competence



Healthy confidence grows competence! **Confidence** is admitting what you don't know to yourself or your client, having faith in your education and abilities, and seeking out candid feedback.

1. **Build a team of peer-to-peer supporters.** Find support at networking events, bar associations, social media, or through volunteering.
2. **Seek out mentors in and outside of your area of practice.** Non-attorney mentors can be extremely helpful as well, bringing you different perspectives and knowledge.
3. **Co-counsel** with experienced attorneys or take on contract work.
4. **Educate yourself about legal research tools and options.** Find the answers your clients need and make sure you're covered with trusted research tools, keep yourself up to date with continuing legal education.
5. **Volunteer in a formal setting** to test the waters in different practice areas, be a part of a team, and increase your credibility in your community.
6. **Get professional liability insurance.**

See California Rules of Professional Responsibility: Rule 1.1 3-110 Failing to Act Competently



KEEP IT SIMPLE, COUNSELOR

Nuts and Bolts of Starting a Law Firm

- **Start simple!** The more formal the structure, the harder to unwind if you decide to change it later. Malpractice insurers like you to start simple, too.
- **Know your mailing address options.** Do not use your home address! Your address may be a traditional office space, virtual office (e.g. Regus), virtual mailbox, or P.O. Box.
- **Create business cards and logos.** VistaPrint, Moo.com, and Zazzle are just a few vendors you can use. You may also consider obtaining bids from artists for logo designs.
- **Get professional liability insurance.** Cost varies by areas of law, years barred, and size of firm. Lawyer's Mutual's Strong Start Program offers insurance for just \$500/year for those in practice less than three years.



- **Create bank accounts.** Most attorneys maintain a business checking and an IOLTA attorney-client trust account. Never co-mingle funds.
- **Purchase a case management tool** that integrates with email, calendaring, and tasks to streamline your workflow. Some options include Clio, Practice Panther, MyCase, RocketMatter.
- **Take advantage of free legal research tools**, including CEB's free research tools or what's offered at your county law library. Ask for product trials from vendors to find the right solution for your needs.
- **Create a business plan.**

Naming Your Firm

- **Create a simple firm name.** You'll have an easier time setting up bank accounts and changing the name later.
- **Use your name as a simple dba if you do not want to form a professional corporation or partnership.** For example, "Maria E. Hall, Attorney at Law" or "Law Office of Maria E. Hall."
- **Avoid names that make your firm appear larger than it is.** For example, "Law Offices of Maria E. Hall" when there is only one office or "Quadros Law Group" when there is only one attorney.

Simple Business Plan Structure

Sections to include in your plan:

- Executive summary and mission: Who are you? Why do you do what you do?
- General firm description
- Services provided
- Marketing plan
- Operational plan
- Management and organization
- Financial plan

Business plan template: <https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/plan-your-business/write-your-business-plan>



PRACTICING SUSTAINABLY

Choosing a Practice Area

- **Narrow your niche.** This will help you become an expert in your field and stand out from the crowd.
- **Assess your natural talents.** Put your efforts into developing your strengths so you can become an expert. Take the Clifton Strength test to assess your talents.
- **Ask yourself, “What do I love doing?”** This is your opportunity to do what you love!
- **Be honest about what you don’t enjoy.** Collaborate and share resources with like-minded attorneys. Delegate tasks by hiring freelance attorneys or use temporary staffing agencies for paralegal or legal assistant help.
- **Determine who your ideal client is.** Can you articulate why you want to serve this group?

Generating Cash Flow

- **Create a realistic budget.** Chart out your personal and business expenses—be candid! How many hours do you need to bill to reach your goals? How many new clients will you accept?
- **Consider work that brings in immediate cash flow.** If your area of law does not lend itself upfront retainer fees (e.g., contingency work), think about offering limited scope services with quick turnaround and/or doing contract work for other attorneys, including writing briefs and making court appearances to help make ends meet.



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