We call this book Flying Solo for a reason. The experience of starting and building your own law practice is not unlike the experience of taking a cross-country trip in your own airplane.

I wouldn’t think of getting in my plane and taxiing to the runway without doing my preflight planning. Before I start the engine on my Cessna, I always spend time thinking about where I want to go, which route to take, how long it will take to get there, and how much fuel I’ll need to arrive safely. And I always check the weather, because it may be clear and sunny at the airport but rainy and windy at my destination.

It is no different when you are planning to open a new solo law practice or to expand an existing practice. The amount of planning that you do before you open the doors and take on your first case is critical. It’s as simple as this: the more planning you do, the more prepared you will be.

In this first part of Flying Solo, the authors consider a wide range of issues, beginning with the personal considerations involved in working for yourself or, for those of you already practicing, leaving your existing firm. You’ll also learn about the importance of creating a business plan up front. Subsequent chapters offer advice on selecting the type of practice that best suits your skills, abilities, and lifestyle. If you are thinking of specializing, Part I will help you make that all-important decision.
No amount of preflight planning will guarantee that you won’t encounter a little turbulence from time to time, whether in the air or in your solo practice, but it will prepare you to deal with any situation that comes up during your flight.

The world of flying has changed since the fourth edition of this book came out. Airplanes have become lighter, more agile, and less expensive. Experimental planes and ultralights have spawned a new industry providing services to pilots who want to build a plane rather than buying one off the assembly line.

Aspiring airplane owners can now buy their planes as “kits” and then spend a year or two assembling the parts. These home-built airplanes take a lot of work to put together, but they are much less expensive than buying an off-the-shelf plane. Owners who have built and then flown their own planes would tell you that the sense of accomplishment is unlike anything they have ever experienced.

Starting your own law practice is very similar to building your own experimental airplane. You pick the components and put them together. Just as with building an airplane, starting a law practice often requires that you do things in a particular order and make sure that all the parts are compatible with one another.

Few pilots build their own airplanes without periodically seeking advice and help from more experienced pilots and mechanics who understand the ins and outs of such projects. You should not hesitate to seek the same kind of advice during the building of your law practice. Some of that advice is free—offered by sympathetic pilots who just want to help—but other times you have to pay, especially when you want someone to come to your hangar and help with more complicated parts of the project. The same applies when you ask for help in starting or improving your law practice.

In the first part of this book, we offer suggestions on where to go for such advice.