

Introduction

After completing my first book, *The Business Guide to Law: Creating and Operating a Successful Law Firm*, I submitted it to publishers and was fortunate enough to have the book accepted by the American Bar Association (ABA). It was published by the ABA in July 2015. Since that time, it has been a wonderful experience to know that the book has become a resource for many attorneys. My intent was to write a great foundational book that provided information to new and somewhat experienced practitioners who were looking to start their own practice or to improve their existing practice—giving them a guidebook to which they could always refer. That book was designed to improve various processes and systems in a law practice and to eventually create a successful and sustainable law firm. In speaking with entrepreneurial lawyers starting their practice or decision makers in existing law practices, I saw the need to address young men and women coming right out of law school on how to be successful as a new attorney and contribute to the betterment of their new law firms.

Our office has a commitment to staying young by regularly hiring attorneys out of law school. The obvious disadvantage of such a program is that the new attorney does not have the necessary skill sets and experience to take cases and handle them independently. However, the incredible advantage is that there are bright, young lawyers graduating every year who are enthusiastic, hardworking, and looking to add value to a firm beginning on day one. That enthusiasm needs to be harnessed, molded, and shaped over time to develop into a successful, contributing senior associate and ultimately a partner.

As a new associate, starting off your career with a good understanding of the nuances that will be measured in your first year of practice will provide a great advantage for you to be successful. It is not a system of gamesmanship or office politics. Rather, like the principles set forth in *The Business Guide to Law: Creating and Operating a Successful Law Firm*, it is a system developed over years observing new associates become good attorneys by learning from their mistakes. It is a system that applies at every law firm. Whether the firm is a sole practitioner, five-attorney firm, or 500-attorney firm, the navigation tools contained in this book are necessary to understand and adopt early in your career that will make the first two years of practice more productive, educational, and—even in the most difficult working environments—more palatable and tolerable so that you can succeed.

This book is not geared to any one predisposed environment. Whether you will work in a small rural community, a medium-sized firm, or a big-city/big-law firm (“BigLaw”),

the principles and disciplines contained in this book will set you on a path to success. This book's primary goal is for you to avoid the mistakes that partners see being made by new associates in a variety of law firm environments. These mistakes are not made because of a lack of preparation or intelligence. The mistakes are often due to a lack of training by the partners and senior attorneys, who may not set forth clear objectives and rules to allow new associates to be successful. This book is (among other things) a compilation of reminders that decision makers in law offices need to give to new associates every day. These are the behaviors, habits, best practices, cultural rules, and values of the office that the decision makers know are needed to make law offices successful.

I have said many times that a new associate does not have to be the smartest, most advanced attorney in the law office on the day they start; however, they need to be the best first-year associate of their class on the day they start. With the rules, guidance, and experience-based recommendations that you will receive through this book, you can be a great first-year associate and add tremendous value to the firm immediately—and, in the long run, as a future partner.

The book is written as an objective guide for the third-year law student and the new associate to be successful. Absent from this book are threats of doom, catastrophe, and the proverbial reexamination of your career choice that the new graduate usually reads about regarding the practice of law. The book is written to remind the reader that the practice of law is the greatest career choice you can make. By knowing in advance the challenges that you will face heading into your first year of practice, you can ease the transition from law school to the practice of law and be on a path to success.

Do you ever think about how much easier high school would have been if you knew then what you know now about life—and how you would have enjoyed those years at a different level? This is your opportunity, as a third-year law student or recent graduate, to be made aware of the challenges, politics, and rigorous work requirements needed to be successful in those first years of practicing law— well in advance of starting your new job.

Cheers to you on your law school graduation and admission to the bar. Every lifelong successful career begins with a single step. This book is your first step.