Lynn Howell: Welcome, my name is Lynn Howell and I’m the co-chair of the program for the Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division in the American Bar Association actually known GPSolo.

Welcome to our podcast today. Our topic is “I'm Not Earning Enough Money: How Attorneys Underearn.” And let me introduce you to our special guest today Ann Guinn. She’s a Practice Management Consultant to Solo and Small Firm.

She teaches attorneys what they didn’t learn in law school about how to run a profitable and satisfying law practice. She helps her clients identify what’s working and fix what’s not working in their businesses with the focus on firm finances, business development and growth opportunities.

Ann has served on the executive committee of the Washington State Bar Solo and Small Firm Practice Section since 1994 and is in her 15th year as co-chairs of the WBSA Solo and Small Firm Conference.

She’s a 2019 recipient of WSBA APEX Lifetime Service Achievement Award for service in the legal industry and the public, and has been featured – a featured speaker at the New York Legal Tech, ABA meetings, conferences, and webinars in solo and small firm conferences across United States.

Her book entitled “Minding Your Own Business: The Solo and Small Firm Lawyer’s Guide to a Profitable Practice” is available through the ABA web
store. She is currently working on her new book “For the ABA Health Attorney Underearning: The Signs, Symptoms, and the Cures.”

Ann, welcome, and tell us exactly what do you mean by underearn, give me, you know, a 101 on this.

Ann Guinn: All right, well, simply put, underearning means that the attorneys are earning below their potential or below their needs. And in my, gosh, sort of my 27 years now of consulting to solo and small practices, I have come to believe that every attorney in this country could be making more money. And it's not matter of working harder, it's a matter of working smarter and tightening up their management skills.

So if people on this call believe they're earning below their potential, below their needs, they're in the right place.

Lynn Howell: OK, now, what do you mean by working smarter? I mean, I think I'm pretty smart, but tell me, it's just a great input, what do you mean by working smarter?

Ann Guinn: Well, I'm going to go over some of the things that you may be doing, hopefully you're doing, or some things that you may need a little bit of a reminder on when it comes to how you manage your practice. And it doesn’t really matter if you're a solo or if you are working for someone else in a larger firm, you still are responsible for managing your individual practice.

So there are some basic things, choices that attorneys make every day in their practice that affects their earning potential, sometimes to the good and sometimes to the bad. But they're in most cases completely unaware of the impact of those choices.

Lynn Howell: OK, when you say underearning as a result of choices made by the practitioner, are you saying that they choose to underearn or what's the genesis of that?

Ann Guinn: I don't think anybody would choose to underearn, but the choices they make caused them to underearn. And there are some telltale signs of underearning
that I notice, when I go into a law firm, I notice pretty quickly they're not living the life they want. They are not able to provide the lifestyle they want for their family.

They may not have enough money to cover their basic needs. Maybe there's not enough money each month to be able to save for emergencies or retirement and that's a big one I find in small firms especially. Attorneys are completely unprepared for retirement or emergencies down the road.

Another sign of underearning is not being able to give your staff their raises, their bonuses they deserve, not being able to buy new technology that would help you to be more effective and productive. I have attorneys that I've been working with over the years who live in deprivation.

I remember when an attorney told me a few years ago, she’s got – at that point, she had about eight years in practice. She said, “I should not be living on peanut butter and tomato soup, and calling my friends and begging me – begging them to take me out to dinner.”

So they have constant stress around money, and they’re not able to go to business the way they want because they don’t have enough money. So these are signs of underearning they may not recognize as being that.

So when we talk about choices, there are actually two ways that these attorneys go with their choices that keeps them earning below their potential. There's passive underearning which means that you are choosing not to do something, or you're failing to do something that would have resulted you making more money. Some examples would be failing to raise your rates, or not spending money on software equipment that would make you more efficient and productive.

For some attorneys, it's not attending to their marketing, or not billing for all of the time work, or procrastinating on tasks, or not controlling the length of initial consultations. So those would be passive underearning, choosing not to do something or failing to do something that would have resulted in you making more money.
The other form of underearning …

Lynn Howell: I got a – hold on, I got a question.

Ann Guinn: Sure, yes.

Lynn Howell: In your statement, controlling the length of the initial consultations, but isn’t it important for you to make a good intelligent decision, so what do you mean controlling the length? Are they just going on for two hours, or if they spend a whole hour with them, how do you tell them to rein that in, I mean, to get a good handle but not give way too much?

Ann Guinn: Good question. I don't have a time limit for initial consultations, but I'm just thinking of my mother. My mother would be the client from hell for any attorney. In fact, she has been a client from hell for several attorneys. She will tell you every detail. She’ll tell you the color of the bow that the neighbor was wearing when she witnessed a car crashed in front of the house or whatever.

So you set the time for initial consultations, you make that plain to your potential client upfront, “I do a 30-minute consultation and there's no charge, or I do a 30-minute consultation and there's a $100 fee or whatever.” And then it's up to you to skillfully guide that client through that consultation and get the information that you need.

If you say, “You know, I typically do an hour and I charge my hourly rate.” That’s fine, but you need to set the time and then guide that client through that as quickly as possible, because at that point, you are in a fact-finding situation and you should be the one in control of the conversation.

You should be the one asking the important questions that will help you determine if this is – if there's even a case here, or if this is something that you can have some risks, how sophisticated this client about the legal process, what are their expectations, are they going to match up yours, that sort of thing.
So it's not so much how long you spend, it's that you control it. I have attorneys call me all the time. I do a 45-minute initial consultation. It often bleeds over to an hour and a half, two hours. Well, to me, that’s the attorney’s issue. You are skillful at asking questions, so put that skill to use and rein them in as much as possible.

Lynn Howell: OK, all right, so we kind of …

Ann Guinn: All right, so the other type of underearning – because that was past – that was a great question. Other type of underearning is active and that's about knowingly doing something that will cause to underearn, again a choice, knowingly doing something. And that would be like accepting a client whom you believe will not be able to pay your fees, or providing excessive pro bono services, and that again is a matter for you to decide what is excessive pro bono.

Discounting your fees is making a choice that causes you to underearn. So that's active underearning. Buying up time, handling non-billable tasks yourself, things that you should be farming out to someone else like your bookkeeping, chances are that’s not your first native skill and God, that’s not the best use of retirement, it's not revenue-producing. Another form of active underearning would be billing the project low to beat your competition.

So two types of underearning here, both about choices, active and passive. So whether or not you're consciously or unconsciously making these decisions, your choices are still causing you to underearn.

Lynn Howell: OK, all right, so we've got to set ourselves up not to underearn by knowing whether we're passive or aggressively being naughty. Now, can you say – can you tell me about a case of an attorney underearning that you encountered that had a positive turnaround, where they made it happen, all of a sudden they're doing fabulously well now?

Ann Guinn: Luckily, I have a slew of those, but one real quickly, I was at a conference last September, an attorney came up that I worked with. We decided it's fairly 20 years ago and he said, “You know, we're still doing a lot of the things that you
taught us to do.” I said, “Gosh, I know so much more now. I wish I could give you more help.” And he said, “We're doing great.”

When I went to work with him, there were three partners and one associate. Five months out of the previous year, the partners haven't taken a penny out of the practice because there was no money. They were barely getting by with a line of credit paying staff and paying rent. This is a 55-year-old law firm. This is not a brand new start-up.

So he was telling me that they are still implementing some of the things that we had discussed. They now have an operating account with $250,000 at any point in time, so they are set. He said, “We no longer worry about, you know, stock market crash or days missed because of snow or whatever.” He said, “We're set.” The two partners retired. He’s still running the firm with five other attorneys now, so he’d doing great.

But I think the best success story was a woman that I worked with a few years back. She had moved from East Coast to West Coast, moved into a community, was doing absolutely everything right to get business, I mean, brilliant ideas and I thought, “Man, she’s really got this all together.” She practiced about 15 years at that point, but in a nonprofit. She’s done solo to do this in this new community.

And I just thought she’s got this nailed and she called me about a year after I met her and said, “I think I need to work with you. I'm not making enough money.” So when I went to meet with her, it turns out that she had been in practice now 18 months as a solo. She never went to bill a client and I said, “What are you living on? How are you supporting the firm?”

And she said, “Advance fee deposits, I take part of the money upfront and then we're to bill for the rest.” And I said, “But you're not billing, why aren't you billing?” “Well, it's not my fault. My legal assistant refuses to prepare bills because she feels they paid enough when they give us that money upfront.” And I said, “So your legal assistant is the one who’s making your business decisions. Your legal assistant is the one who’s deciding what your
income will be and your profitability, et cetera, et cetera, is all in the hands of your legal assistant.”

She said, “Well, you know, I guess if you look at it that way,” and so I said, “The first thing we'll do is fire the legal assistant and get you somebody who will support you.” And so we did a big long consultation, I spent several hours with her. I asked her what her financial goal is, what she would like to take out of the practice. And she thought long and hard and finally she said, “I'd love to be able to take a thousand dollars a month out of the business.” But she wasn’t, she did take $5,000 out in a year.

And I said, “Is a thousand dollars a month enough to take care of your commitment at home?” She was in a two-income relationship so she wasn’t sole support, and she said, “Well, I'd love to take $2,000, but that can never happen.” So as I said we did this long consultation and I did my very best for her, threw out everything I could think of that might help her and went on my way.

And about a year later, she called and said, “I think I need to work with you again.” And I was stunned that she was still in practice and I said, “Catch me up.” She said, “Well, I've got two full-time attorneys working for me. I'm hiring a third one in the fall. I've got two legal assistants and receptionist. The business is booming. You gave me the best piece of advice that anyone had ever given me in my 15 years of practice, four words.”

And I said, “What four words turned this around?” And she said, “Bill clients, get money.” And it turned out that a couple of months after we spoke the second time, a big firm in Downtown Seattle approached her, bought out her firm and made her a counsel. She’s got it made in the shade.

That was a phenomenal turnaround from somebody who had never billed a client in 18 months to go to the point where she had this really good practice going and was able to support others and take care of her clients really well. So that was the best turnaround from tremendously gross underearning to a happy ending.

Lynn Howell: Well, we all want a happy earning for all of the lawyers we know.
Ann Guinn: Yes.

Lynn Howell: Can you tell about – so lots of attorneys have problems that occur, but have you identified a number of behaviors that cause attorneys to underearn as well? Can you elaborate on like what are the behaviors that trigger this to occur?

Ann Guinn: Well, if we had two hours, I could give you my entire list because it just keeps growing. But I've identified just really easily about 35 behaviors that cause attorneys to underearn. We don't have time to hit them all. But I'll hit on the ones that I see most frequently.

First is giving away time and that ties in with another one, undervaluing your work. I hear attorneys say, “Well, you know, I'm not going to bill for this. It only took me 20 minutes because it was no big deal. I just wrote him a quick letter.” But the quick letter solved the problem for a client.

So the attorney said, “I'm not going to bill because it only took me 20 minutes.” Yes, it took you 20 minutes because you know what you're doing, because you have years of experience. You've been down this road before. You know exactly what to say and it took care of a problem for a client. So giving away time and undervaluing work I think kind of hand in hand, and I see that happening a lot when I – yes?

Lynn Howell: Just for a minute there, let’s say I do that, all right, and I got the 20-minute and it was for a long-term client that you've had some things for on and off, and you kind of feel embarrassed to give them a bill for a 100 bucks or something modest because it was such a short time period.

Is there something where you just not give it away, but put in there like if I have a minimum when I do a matter for you, like a minimum of $200 or something so it doesn’t look so modest on the bill? It doesn’t make you feel like you're not going to get anything for and it wouldn't be – so that the client still sees the value in it, but you don't want to overcharge, anything like that?
Ann Guinn: Interesting question. If you're going to do that, you'd have to, of course, have it written out in the fee agreement so that the client understands that this is how I work. One area I do urge minimum and that’s phone calls and emails. You tell your client, “You know, I have two-tenths of an hour minimum for reading and responding to emails or phone calls.”

But if you've got a client that’s been a long-term client and you do something like this, you can use your conscience on this. If your fee agreement allows you to charge a minimum, say, $200 or $500 or whatever, the client has agreed, then do it that way.

But I think the bottom line is that what you can work with your clients get in the fee agreement. I like hybrid fees where some things are charged at flat fees, some things are charged hourly, and you have the ability to kind of go back and forth. So if that was in the fee agreement that you charge hybrid depending on the task before you do the task. And say, “I'm going to do this letter,” and you know it's not going to take you very long, just tell the client, “I'll do the letter and I'm going to charge you, you know, only $200 for this.” You know, put a free agreement.

So I think, yes, you could set a minimum like that or just a by task price with the client as you go on providing the fee agreement gives you that latitude.

Lynn Howell: OK, all right, so I think moving on …

Ann Guinn: All right, so …

Lynn Howell: … tell me some of the other stories.

Ann Guinn: All right, let’s see if you start hanging your head on any of this here. I can’t see you so I'll never know.

Failure to market or relying on ineffective marketing strategies, a lot of attorneys don't like the idea of marketing so they throw up a website and call it good, but they never really think about is that working. When they really sit down and take a look, they figure out that the bulk of the clients are actually coming from referrals.
So, one of my clients some years ago put a $2,500 ad in one of the alternative yellow pages books against my recommendation. And in a year’s time, he had two phone calls from that $2,500 ad. But he thought he found it easy. He was so shy, he could not bring himself to go out and do any networking, attend meetings, anything like that, and this was a nice passive way for him to market he thought.

He got two calls. One, somebody calling him about a practice area that he didn’t handle and the other was a guy made an appointment, never showed up, so $2,500 down the drain. So pay attention to the marketing and how it's working, figure out your ROI. But make sure that you're attracting the right kinds of clients and that leads into the next one, accepting bad cases and clients.

I think there is not an attorney around who hasn’t at some point accepted what is affectionately known as a rent case. The rent is due next week and you don't have the money, and somebody walks with a checkbook in hand. You don't particularly like them. You don't think they have a very strong case, but you need the money. So sometimes attorneys accept bad clients and bad cases.

When I do CLE, I frequently ask how many of you have ever regretted taking a client, and all the hands go up and everyone is laughing. I say, how many of you ever regret turning away a client? No hands go up. So tied into that is also accepting clients who can’t pay. I encounter this all the time. Attorneys have wonderfully large hearts and they want to help, and they feel sorry for people. But you still have financial obligations as well for your family, for your business, for your staff, whatever.

So if you are routinely taking in clients who can’t pay you, you're jeopardizing a whole lot of people through that behavior. So you need to be able to qualify the clients as best as you can during that initial consultation as to their ability to pay you regardless of the outcome of the matter and they pay you if they lose.
Undervaluing work, we talked about that. Another one I click through is continuing expectations that somewhere and something will save you. I know an attorney who had his whole life hanging on the expectation he’s going to get a $125,000 split fee with a co-counsel in a case and that’s all he talked about when that $125,000 comes in, when that $125,000 comes in.

Well, co-counsel missed the deadline. The case was dismissed with prejudice, $125,000 gone. This attorney left his home and he left his office. He left the staff and ended up applying for a job in Guam because he needs to work somewhere.

Rationalizing low income, this is big. I ask attorneys all the time what would you like to earn like the attorney I mentioned, one attorney, a thousand.

Lynn Howell: Right.

Ann Guinn: They say to me, this is really kind of ambiguous things like, “Well, I don't need a lot.” Well, what, give me a figure. “Well, you know, I have modest needs.” What? Give me a figure. So rationalizing low income is almost guaranteed to keep you in the low income bracket.

Sometimes it's codependency, putting another people’s needs ahead of your own and that goes back to accepting clients who can’t pay you. Living in financial chaos, I have had any number of clients over the years who have no idea of what it costs to run a practice.

They have no idea what they need to take home. Some of them have never seen a problem law statement. So that ends up to financial chaos. When you don't know where you are financially, you cannot be making good business decisions.

Poor time management skills, that’s kind of given. Failure to control your time and not using the time appropriately on the high value work, the revenue-producing work. Procrastination is a big one. If you get something done in an hour and a half because you're under the gun, when it would have taken you five hours to do if you’ve given yourself sufficient time to do it properly, you've, one, jeopardize the client because you've thrown something together
in an hour and a half that’s not your best work. And two, you just got yourself three and a half hours of fees.

So procrastination is a big one, disorganization as well, spending a lot of time looking for a lot of stuff. And then one that an attorney sent me an email after I spoke on this one time, the imposter syndrome and I had not have that in my list. But that's where you believe that someday somebody is going to figure out you don't know what they think you know.

You're not as smart as you think – as they think you are and that you were not the best choice for the matter, and that can really cause you to pull in and not make smart business decisions, not look at things like growth and raising your rates and all that because you don't believe you deserve it.

So those are some of the top ones that I see.

Lynn Howell: OK, now, when you talk about people who procrastinate, everyone is guilty of that. How do you convince them not to procrastinate when it's just so easy to do?

Ann Guinn: Well, I do a lot of work with time – on time management with my clients and I've got some little tips and tricks to get them moving along. But I think when I show dollars and cents like this, if it took you an hour and a half to do it, you charge $200 an hour, you bill $300. But if you have had sufficient time to do what you did, but you didn’t do it, if you had taken sufficient time to do it then it would have taken you five hours, you would have billed $1,000.

So I think when you see the black and white, the difference there between $300 and $1,000, and the difference between doing maybe an adequate job, maybe not even that, versus doing a really good job for your client which is what they're paying for, what they deserve. I think that gets a lot of attention.

I worked with a fellow one time, he was the champion procrastinator and he would not review documents before he sign them and send them out the door. His staff will be running around like crazy putting his things together and he just scribbles his name and send them out the door.
And I said, “Well, aren't you going to read that? You know, you just committed yourself to something and your client has something that you haven't read.” He said, “No, if there's a problem, I'll read it tonight. If there's a problem, we'll file an amendment tomorrow.” Well, that's not serving your clients well. But that was a constant procrastination with him.

Lynn Howell: OK, so much just in your DNA to procrastinate and you have to help them out of that problem …

Ann Guinn: And it can overcome, believe me, I am a procrastinator and I still – I meet deadlines. So you can do it. There are some great books out there on how to overcome procrastination. There are some good classes on it. In fact, so we should do a podcast on how to handle procrastination.

Lynn Howell: We might have to find a good …

Ann Guinn: If you don't put it off.

Lynn Howell: Yes, true, if I don't put that off. All right, so we know how all of this comes, but once you've identified yourself as an underearner and you're not an imposter, but you're just an underearner, what can you do to overcome this behavior pattern?

Ann Guinn: Well, I've identified seven steps to overcoming underearning and first is -- it's like 12-set program -- just acknowledging that you are an underearner and committing to changing the behaviors that cause you to underearn.

The second step is identifying how you underearn and pinpointing the specific trouble spots. So we go back to the passive and active underearning, really sit down sometime away from the office. So have a paper and a pen, no interruptions, and think about the different things you do that might cause you to underearn. And I've given you some food for thoughts here on what those things might be.

And then you have to think about what's the payoff, what do I get out of this and how might I turn this around. And then pick one of those actions that
causes you to underearn and I'd start with one that has the biggest impact on your earnings right now, and write out a plan to change that behavior.

The most important thing you can do once you get this plan is to get an accountability partner, somebody that you trust, who will schedule regular check-ins with you, and help you stay on track, and ask you how you're doing with your commitment here to change this behavior.

The third step is setting personal achievement goals and developing a plan to reach those goals. This goes one step beyond this developing a plan to change one behavior. As an example, if you want $100,000 this year, how will you do that? What will it take you to reach your goal?

And then share those goals with an accountability partner and reward yourself when you achieve a goal because we all like recognition and we all like rewards. So give yourself not just a pat on the back, you give yourself treats. It could be something small like a coffee drink. It could be a day at the spa or whatever.

The fourth step is setting one goal for yourself each day at work and then planning your workday and protecting your work time. And what I do with my clients is have them get in the habit of blocking out time on their calendar for revenue-producing work and that should come first in the day and then administer your tasks after so that you make sure that every day you are generating as much in billings as you need to cover your overhead.

Now, this gets complicated because if you charge $200 an hour, but you have realization rate of 50 percent, you're only collecting $100 an hour. The realization rate is a percentage of fees/bill that you actually collect. So you need to be aware of the realization rate here to set this realistic goal.

And then the biggie here, this is – I insist this is the number one thing that would turn underearning attorneys and that is recording their time contemporaneously as you go through the day because if you wait till the end of the day to record your time, you lose 10 percent to 15 percent of potential billable time. So same thing, I have to write everything down before I go
home. You're not going to write everything down because you're going to forget.

Eliminating time wasters, an attorney friend of mine deleted games from her desktop. I thought that was the bravest thing I've ever heard. I have tried and tried to do that and I can’t. But that is a huge time waster for a lot of us.

This is out of the office, but get plenty of rest, make sure that you are full of energy and alert and awake when you're in the office when you're doing your work. And then periodically throughout the day ask yourself what's the best use of my time right now and just so you plan accordingly.

The fifth one is pay attention to your business, become a proactive manager rather than reactive. And that covers a variety of things like accounts receivable, don't let them get beyond 60 days old. Review your billing rate regularly and adjust accordingly because the cost of doing business keeps going up. Your rates need to go up as well.

Develop a budget for your practice and stick to it and compare it to your actual expenditures. See how you’re doing and if your projections were pretty much on target. Keep a time log of all your time throughout the day, billable and non-billable. So when you look at the non-billable, it helps you determine if you need to hire somebody to help with those things or if there's somebody you could delegate some of those things to. But get rid of them.

Bill promptly and accurately in detail, and make a plan for your practice to guide your business decisions. That's a business plan. And just learn to say no, that is a big one. Turn away clients that are not very appropriate to you.

Then the sixth step is spend time every day in marketing. That could be something as simple as sending an email and making a phone call to line up a lunch date, coffee date. It might be attending the bar meeting. It might be sending thank you notes to somebody for a referral.

Do something every day in marketing. I urge my clients to commit 30 minutes a day to marketing and some days, you know, if they attend a bar meeting that might be an hour and a half out of the office. Fine, give them a
pass for a day or two. But you need to constantly be working at that marketing.

And then the last step here is delegate the tasks you shouldn’t be doing and the first thing that comes to mind for me is bookkeeping. Get rid of that. Designing and updating your website, here somebody to do that. If you can’t afford a 40-hour a week legal assistant, get a virtual assistant to help with routine correspondence or preparing mailings or whatever. But get rid of the things that don't bring in money.

So that's my quick seven steps to overcoming underearning and you'll figure out some on your own based on the problems that you have that cause the underearning, the behaviors.

Lynn Howell: OK, you'll figure them out as we go along. But what if – like if you could think of the best thing, if they only have one thing to remember from this talk other than we're both fabulous, what is the thing that you would want them to take away, the biggest to-do item that you would give them?

Ann Guinn: Well, it would come under the umbrella of treat this as a business. I see attorneys making decisions that a doctor would never make, that Macy’s would never make, that your trans broker would never make about billing, about marketing, about customer service and all of this. Treat this as a business.

But then when I think about underearning, what's the biggest cause of underearning, it would be two-fold. I think it would be capturing your time and then undervaluing your work. So you capture your time, but then you look and think, “Ah, I'm not going to charge them for that. That wasn’t worth it,” and a client write out $500 because you said it wasn’t worth his time to send the bill.

I track you've been sending the bill and you got a check in three days. So that was worth the time. So don't undervalue your services. You need to think of the value that you bring to your clients and you need to be paid appropriately for that. But you can't be paid for things you didn’t write down, for time you didn’t capture.
So that – and you know, when we talk about – I'm talking hourly here and flat fees. Not a lot of attorneys are charging flat fees that actually cover their hourly rate. So again knowing what your hourly rate needs to be to cover your overhead and your compensation, and then making sure your flat fees work.

Contingent cases, you're not, of course, getting paid hourly. But you need to do an analysis of the cases you’re taking and what you’re actually getting paid per hour for that. So, sorry, it wasn’t just one, but all of things kind of come together here. You need to look at this as a business and you need to understand the numbers of that business in order to make smart business decisions.

Lynn Howell: OK, so I have to understand that I am in a business, that I need to look at what value I bring to my clients.

Ann Guinn: And one last thing and this absolutely will bring you more money is bill 15 minutes more per day. If you have to work, do it. Make that choice. I'm not going to stop work because it's 20 minutes to 5:00 and I'm leaving at 5:00. Let me put 15 minutes on the next task. I'm going to have to do those 15 minutes at some point.

So just if you bill 15 minutes more a day and you bill $200 an hour, that’s $11,000 you're going to add to the bottom line this year. And I guarantee if you start billing – consciously billing 15 minutes more a day, you're going to end up with billing an hour or an hour and a half more a day because you're going to be conscious of how you choose to use your time.

Lynn Howell: OK, so you still want to be thoroughly conscious and not be underearners, but yet market and we don't – marketing is kind of hard because it takes away from billing.

Ann Guinn: Yes.

Lynn Howell: And so there's got to be that fine balance of how much time you should be marketing and how much of that can you really offload to social media and
others to do for you if you're not in a – because if you're in personal injury and you can do heavy duty advertising, that’s fabulous versus you're not having the be at every bar function shaking the hands and kissing a baby.

But for those that come from a referral business, how do you justify how – where is that sweet spot? Am I doing too much?

Ann Guinn: Well, I set fairly simple goals for my clients because they're pretty much all solos or small firm attorneys and they don't have a lot of time to do this and they don't have a lot of money. So I tell them once a week, go to lunch with somebody. Renew that referral source, keep those relationships alive.

With social media, that takes time. If you're sending – if you're blogging – I got clients who blog once a month, that doesn’t do many good. All the experts say you need to be blogging at least daily, but most people don't have the time to do that. If you blog once a week, even that would be great. But really look at what's working in your marketing and then make the decision how to spend the time on marketing.

And if social media is resulting in a lot of work for you then double down on that. Work out a plan, as I said, I recommend 30 minutes a day, maybe one day you go on the LinkedIn and you go through and do all the congratulatory notes, and answer all of the friend requests and that sort of thing. And maybe the next day, you put in the 30 minutes in doing a blog or whatever.

But you can’t make good marketing decisions until you know what return you're getting on the various strategies. You could be like my guy with the banana pages. He got in (ZIPS).

But it was easy for him because he just wrote a check for $2,500. Well, $2,500 you would take a lot of people to lunch. You would have done a whole lot of other marketing activities, you know, adding a charity program or whatever. But you have to understand what's coming back from your strategies.

Lynn Howell: OK, well, I think we're done with the stuff unless you have anything else that I've missed or failed to ask you. I think I got it all.
Ann Guinn: I think the thing I want to leave everybody with is you have worked hard to learn your craft here, you know, going through four years of college and then going through law school, and out in the workforce here and honing your skills on a daily basis.

You are serving clients in a way that they can’t do on their own. You're helping them solve problems. You're helping them get justice. You need to value yourself and you need to be paid appropriately for what you're doing, and you need to consciously think about the decisions you're making that impacts your earnings.

So after this podcast is done, sit back for a few moments and think about your own practice, and what you might be doing that causes you to underearn. Make a commitment to change that and go for it and earn like your worth, my final words.

Lynn Howell: Thank you so much, Ann. We thank all of our listeners and please note that we have three-part series with Ann Guinn. So this is the first podcast you've listened to. There are two more that you'll be able to hear.

We thank you so much for listening today and from the Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division, we bet you would do and listen to us again. Thank you. Goodbye.

Ann Guinn: Thank you, Lynn, and goodbye.

END