

# Frequently Asked Questions

## *Starting a Practice*

**1. How do I start a practice?**

Contact the WSBA Law Office Management Assistance Program (LOMAP) by calling 206-733-5914 and ask for the New Practice Packet. You will need a Washington business license and a municipal business license at the minimum. Think about the name of your practice and reserve a web URL.

**2. What else?**

Set goals for fee revenue and office costs. Prepare a business plan and a list of questions to ask LOMAP staff.

**3. What else?**

Schedule an appointment with LOMAP staff to discuss your particular situation. The first half hour is free of charge and \$35 per hour thereafter but the meeting usually requires only an hour or so in total.

**4. Aren't there any checklists for getting started?**

Yes! Go to <http://www.wsba.org/lawyers/services/startupchecklist41007.pdf> and download it!

**5. How much should I expect to spend to get started?**

About \$10,000 and use credit whenever possible. Keep your own savings as a reserve of last resort.

**6. Why do I need that much money?**

For equipment, software and operating costs. Acquire the best computer, scanner, printer, backup battery, and fax machine that you can afford. Stay away from multifunction devices and inkjets. Operating costs include rent, utilities, telephone, paper, and other items that must be acquired before you have any cash in the door from clients. MAC or Windows is fine but be committed to learning the software.

**7. I am not a geek. Any suggestions?**

Yes, attend our computer software classes each month at the WSBA. They are free of charge and discuss practice management software, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, Word, and Adobe Acrobat 8. Just register at [juliesa@wsba.org](mailto:juliesa@wsba.org)

**8. Anything else?**

Yes, you! Think about how you handle stress. Think about how you like to work. Choose a practice area carefully. That decision drives these

variables: meetings, travel, type of client, size of file, interruptions, research and writing, getting paid timely among others. The better your organizational skills, the better chance for success that you have. Test: How often do you balance your checking account?

**9. I just remembered...what about my need to set up a trust account?**

You need a trust account only if you handle funds that are not yours such as advanced fee deposits. See this link for complete details <http://www.wsba.org/media/publications/pamphlets/managing.htm>

## ***Building a Practice***

### **1. How do I find clients?**

**Often it may be your family and friends who become your first clients. Why? Because they know you. And being known is the key to your success throughout your career.**

**As you practice you will have three reputations that define who you are to others. Your professional reputation establishes you among colleagues. Your practice area, integrity, honesty, level of service, knowledge of the law and how easy you are to deal with all come into play. Your social reputation establishes you among colleagues, friends, family and staff. Your social reputation includes how others perceive your table manners, use of alcohol (if applicable) and general social bearing as you engage in professional activities, hobbies, sports activities and cultural interests. Are you available at all or always “busy?” Your street reputation establishes how you are perceived by staff. Your street reputation describes your office and how you handle the management of your practice. Examples are your level of professionalism and respect when communicating with your staff, non-monetary fringe benefits such as staff scheduling flexibility, and, of course, your management of anger and how you communicate reprimands. All of these networks can attract or repel new business.**

**Solo lawyers usually can handle 25 to 40 open matters in a competent fashion at one time. If you want more business, do the following:**

**Determine how clients find you now and use these sources**

**Encourage referrals from clients and other professionals**

**Have a website**

**Carry business cards at all times**

**Contact former clients to see if any need your help**

**Attend CLEs and meet other lawyers**

**The LOMAP Lending Library offers books on loan about finding and keeping clients. The list of marketing and other titles is at <http://www.wsba.org/lawyers/services/index.htm#MK>**

### **2. How much can I expect make?**

**Focus on gross fees which are payments to you for your services. Gross fees do not include costs and expenses incurred by the matters. Minimum gross fees should be \$150,000 per year as soon as the number of clients reaches a suitable level. Of that amount you**

**will realize about \$100,000 that pays compensation, fringe benefits, and retirement contributions. If not, it is usually because of giving too much free service, clients unable to pay, poor billing practices, poor follow up on outstanding accounts due, and reluctance to ask for sufficient money at the outset of the matter as an advanced fee deposit.**