

Growing Income with an Estate Practice

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Estate planning in the United States has evolved from English, European, and Middle Eastern traditions. During Biblical times, custom required people to leave property to their firstborn. Centuries later in Greek and Roman times, decedents could transfer property to other people. Estate planning remained mostly unwritten until the Middle Ages when Roman Emperor Justinian adopted a law requiring written wills. The requirement for written wills was perpetuated by English statutes adopted during the Post-Medieval Period. In modern times, written estate plans are still essential for individuals wanting to distribute property to family, friends, and others of their choosing.

The Coronavirus situation has forced everyone to consider their mortality and prompted many to create or update estate plans. Lawyers can take advantage of this trend by reminding clients about the need for estate planning. The benefits of an estate practice include appreciative clients, easy referrals, growing demand, and a harmonious work-life balance. The following are some tips and resources for starting an estate practice or building an existing one.

Competing for Clients. Attract clients by networking with accountants, insurance professionals, and wealth planners. Communicate your availability by writing articles for local newspapers and making presentations to clubs, religious groups, and other organizations. Add content to your website explaining how your services are tailored to fit the estate planning needs of your clients. Consider focusing on an affinity group like the elderly, young parents, or veterans.

Developing Forms. Develop a forms library using print and online sources. Use Microsoft 365, Google G Suite, or drafting software to automate document assembly. Check the website of your state bar association for forms and publications for estate planning.

Gaining Expertise. Gain expertise by pursuing a graduate degree in estate planning, attending seminars, and reading treatises. Stay current by attending CLE courses and becoming active in bar committees, discussion groups, and estate planning councils. Join the ABA's Section on Estate Law and your state bar committee on estate planning.

Safeguarding Data and Documents – Offer to keep documents in safekeeping for clients. State your document retention policy in your engagement letter. Give clients instructions about accessing, updating, and making their documents available. Invite clients to make an appointment for an annual checkup.

Virtual Lawyering. Distinguish yourself from other firms by being available for virtual consultations, e-signing, and notarizing of documents. Several states have adopted laws allowing online signing and notarizing during the Coronavirus situation.

Resources From a historical perspective, read articles like the short [history of estate planning](#) published by the Law Library of Congress. For guidance on starting an estate practice, review articles published by the [ABA](#), [Informa](#), [Jurisdiction](#) and [NLBM](#). Develop skills by reading articles about [estate planning](#), [document drafting](#), and [virtual consultations](#). Enhance expertise by reading books like the ABA's [Guide to Estate Planning](#), CAP's [Mastering Trusts and Estates](#) and Thomson's [Drafting Trusts and Wills](#). Stay up-to-date by attending educational programs sponsored by the [ABA](#), [ALI](#), [NCEP](#), and [other providers](#). Update your forms with downloads from the [ABA](#), [state bars](#), and [other](#) organizations. Stay up-to-date on [legislation](#) permitting [e-notarizing](#) and [electronic wills](#).

Conclusion. The Coronavirus situation has given an unexpected boost to estate practices. Take advantage of this opportunity to grow your practice. Market estate planning services to existing clients and prospective ones. Use the resources mentioned in this article to develop your practice and enhance your reputation as an estate planner.

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Mr. Goldblatt has authored numerous books and articles about marketing for lawyers.