A new way to work-life balance

By Tara Puckey

It's no secret that the "just do more" habits of law school stick around well into the professional practice - an endless cycle of overwhelming stacks of work, overflowing inboxes and late nights

- because "that's just what it takes to succeed in law."

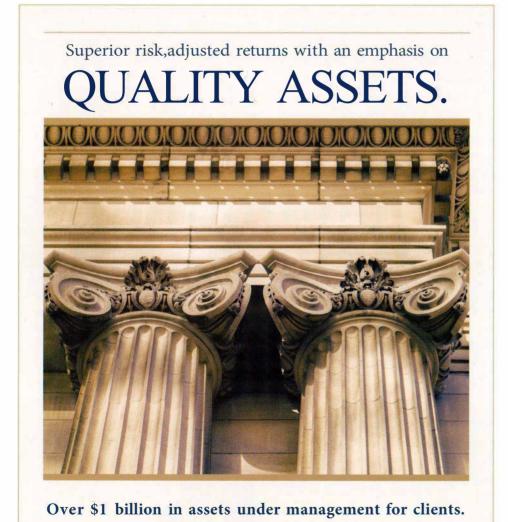
But success brings its own set of challenges. Growth isn't isolated, which means more work in every area of your practice, and for most, the answer is to work harder and longer. I'd argue that over time the work simply *becomes* life, a nasty side effect of success without the proper "treatment:' In the end, the consequences can be dire. A 2016 study by the American Bar Association found that nearly 21 percent of lawyers reported problematic drinking, more than 61 percent suffer from anxiety, and close to half struggle with depression.

Despite the dismal statistics, it's difficult to see or manage a path to a successful practice without the deeply engrained, high-priced model of endless work, especially for those who built a practice of their own. A growing practice breeds a tendency to chase the next goal before completing the first, to assess cost before benefit and to revert frequently to the "that's the way we've always done it" mentality.

At the core, the deeply rooted issues symptomatic to the business, not legal, aspect of operating a practice are far more complicated than drawing a simple line in the sand: work here, life here. At best the decades-old advice that rests on strict separation is outdated. A healthier future depends on an integrated, authentic work-life balance that focuses on finding a new and better way to operate the business of the business. So where to start?

Level up your management skills. You already have a deep understanding of the law, but building and managing a

You already have a deep understanding of the law, but building and managing a practice is a different beast. Don't assume you're up to speed on the latest ways to manage your practice's finances, to hire and fire employees or to structure a plan for growth, not to mention the complicated management of employees and clients alike. Take advantage of skills-based training programs that help you work smarter, not harder, when it comes to managing your business.



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Build a better team - and use

them. A team is leverage, especially if it's used properly, and without one, you're just doing a job - one that runs out of value when you're not present. With the *right* team, you're able to pass along the things you're not interested in, surround yourself with people who excel in areas where you struggle, and increase your practice's capacity while freeing up your own personal capacity for other things, *not* more work!

Work with a focus on systems and technology. Creating processes and procedures that help you and your team work smarter, not harder, is an up-front investment in time and, sometimes, money. Putting new technology to good use can be the same way. Don't skimp - you get what you pay for. Expert systems will free up your whole team to think about what comes next, and technology can unburden you in so many ways but only if those things are done correctly from the start.

Provide the best service (that isn't just about the law). Remember, most clients aren't hiring you because they agree with your legal opinion. They're hiring you because someone they trust said something good about you or your practice or because they have a "good feeling" about you. And while they want top-notch legal representation once they have hired you, they also want attentive customer service. Don't disregard the importance of communication, listening and common understanding.

Always be you - the authentic you. Every good transaction starts with a good interaction because, in the end, relationships drive success. Peers, employees and clients want to know that you're trustworthy, and that's usually tossed aside if they feel like they're working with a non-responsive robot. Set boundaries but don't forget that we're all human - and that commonality can be your greatest asset.

Remember, your legal knowledge is your product, not your purpose. Building a healthy, manageable integration between work and life requires a law practice that operates on a foundation of smart and strong business principles to guide everything from process to people, and it's never too late to start.

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