CHAPTER #1

8:30 – 9:00am

Why I Love Being In Solo/Small Firm Practice

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Electronic format only:
1. Why I Love Being in Solo Practice Paper

PowerPoint distributed at the program and also available for download in electronic format:
1. Why I Love Being in Solo Practice

The electronic version of all of the documents are available on the KCBA website: https://www.kcba.org/cle/EventDetails.aspx?Event=4612
WHY I LOVE BEING IN A SOLO PRACTICE

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Although there certainly are exceptions, generally speaking if your intent is to be wealthy, don’t become a solo practitioner. On the other hand, if you are satisfied with earning a comfortable living, being able to make your own career and personal decisions and being in charge of your life and practice, being a solo practitioner might well be the life for you.

I’m a true solo practitioner and have been since the mid-1980s. For the last approximate 12 years, I have operated with no paralegals, no receptionist and a part-time legal assistant. The legal assistant doubles as my wife and also as my bookkeeper. Instead of a receptionist I use an answering service. It is from this base of operation that I ran my personal injury practice, my mediation practice and served as president of the WSBA. Admittedly, it would have been easier if I at least had a paralegal but, based on results, it was not essential.

I am here to tell you that you, too, can have a successful and satisfying legal career as a solo practitioner, either with or without paralegals. Although some
of you may be a solo practitioner due to lack of alternatives, many of you have made a conscious choice to be a solo practitioner. Those of us who have stuck with the solo practice of law may well have different reasons for having done so. I want to share with you why I love being a solo practitioner.

WHY I LOVE BEING A SOLO PRACTITIONER: TOOLE’S TOP TEN REASONS:

1. **Great Opportunity to Work Alongside My Wife of 30 Years**
   - Wife has immediate first hand knowledge of financial ups and downs of practice, thereby relieving stress of having to “break” the news
   - Able to share common experiences
   - Wife has strong work-ethic, is creative and results oriented and we have good synergy when working together
   - Take joint pride in a successful practice

2. **Only Accountable to Person in the Mirror (and My Wife)**
   - I’m my own boss and make my own decisions
   - I can switch directions with my practice over a weekend
   - I don’t have the responsibility or worry about making decisions that might negatively affect my staff
3. **Great Resources Available Through Computer Technology**
   - Internet, emails, list serves, laptops, iPADS, online research eliminate many significant reasons for needing partners or associates
   - Can have more mobility and am not as tied to office

4. **Backup Supplied by Office Sharing**
   - By office sharing with attorney familiar with my area of practice, I create the necessary cover if out of town, on vacation, ill or have a conflicting appointment or event
   - Also provides an attorney to share thoughts and with whom to discuss cases, person to person

5. **Make All My Own Major Decisions Regarding the Practice**
   - Other than with my wife, I don’t need to consult and get agreement from partners regarding major decisions such as office location, leasing space, equipment to purchase, bank financing, staff to hire, vendors to use, clients to accept
   - Don’t have to ask partners to borrow money from firm or pay dividend

6. **Increased Flexibility**
   - Can lease my own office space or rent space from an existing firm
   - Able to reduce my commute to five minutes
• Able to keep my overhead down, which results in less headaches
• Don’t have staff and therefore don’t have worries about them calling in sick, their children being sick or them taking time off for vacations.
• Use reception service and know there will always be someone to answer phones

7. **Office as a Personal Day Care Center**

• When my kids were young, we set up playpen and had toys and if there was a problem with day care, we could handle it short term at office
• These items were available when clients came in with young children
• My wife loves babies and kids and could entertain clients’ babies and toddlers when they started fussing due to a meeting that went too long or they woke up from a nap too soon

8. **In Charge of My Own Time Off**

• Can take vacations whenever I want or attend events and activities of my kids
• Can attend school functions
• Can get as involved as much as I want in Bar Association activities
• Can take time off during school holidays and breaks

9. \textit{Don’t Worry About Theft and Embezzlement}

• My wife and I are the only ones who can sign on our office checking accounts and I am the only one who can sign on the IOLTA trust account

10. \textit{No Worries About Getting Fired}

• No job security concerns over billable hours
• Don’t have to please a supervisor or managing partner
• Can come in late to work or leave early
• Can mouth off to the boss, for all the good it will do me

So, those are the top ten reasons I love being a solo practitioner. It has worked for me for almost thirty years. It has given me the flexibility to develop a practice that fits my lifestyle, my family needs, my professional drives and my desire to be in service and give back to my community. I have been able to enjoy a great family life, have personal successes, earn the respect of my peers and to have made a difference in the world. What more could I want?
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