Let Handle|Bar Program Help You Manage your Practice

BY SHAIN MANUELE, ESQ.,
PRACTICE MANAGEMENT ADVISOR, HANDLE|BAR

During my first year of law school, one of my professors handed every student in class a half-sheet of paper and asked us to think about why we were attending law school. She explained she did not want a list of reasons, but wanted it narrowed down to a single reason. She asked us to write it down and turn it in to her. The time it took for all of us to turn in our paper was surprisingly long. It appeared that all of the students really gave this question some serious thought and wanted to be sure to select what they thought would be the accurate answer to this pop quiz. Once everyone had turned in their papers, she placed them in a neat stack and looked around the room and said, "anyone that didn't write money as their answer is a liar."

I think this comment was meant as a joke, but there was certainly truth to it. It really made me contemplate the reasons I chose to pursue a career in law. I often reflected on this experience throughout law school, and I found it interesting that over the course of the next three years, no one taught me how to make money, nor did anyone teach me how to run a business. It was no secret that many students were there with hopes of having a lucrative career, yet no one took the time to teach us how to attain this goal. Do not get me wrong, law school taught me some important lessons necessary to practicing as an attorney and important information I needed to pass the bar, but the curriculum did not include how to manage and operate a practice.

Many attorneys graduate law school and pass the bar with a desire to run their own practice. Some attorneys decide later in their career that they want to be their own boss and set their own hours. But many quickly realize after entering into the legal field that they did not receive the proper training to handle a private practice, much less a large firm. Running a private practice can be intimidating at first, and many attorneys do not know where to turn for help, support, or resources. But if you're an attorney in Nevada, the state bar has some good news from the recent initiation of the Handle|Bar program.

The Handle|Bar program is designed to help with practice management questions and steer you in the right direction. It has several resources available to help you start your practice, manage your practice, protect your practice, and transition your practice. The state bar's webpage for Handle|Bar can be found at https://nvbar.org/for-lawyers/resources/practice-management/. The bar did not just develop a website to assist attorneys, it created an actual program to assist attorneys. Experienced practitioners in that program can help answer questions and be of assistance in real time.

I am the practice management advisor for the Handle|Bar Program, and this article outlines the various resources available to you.

Practice Management Advice

Sometimes all you need is to ask a quick question. If you have a question or need advice, the Practice Management Advisor is available for free consultations regarding business development and marketing; client-relationship management; adopting and using legal technology; process improvements and office management; considerations for starting a law firm; buying, selling, and closing a law firm; basic considerations for trust accounts and IOLTA; and other topics related to the practical management of a firm.

> **An attorney can submit their question online or call 702-745-1300. Keep in mind that if the question is about an ethical issue or the Rules of Professional Conduct, the state bar also offers an ethics hotline at 702-382-2200.**

Incubator Program

If you are new to the practice of law or looking to enter private practice for the first time in your career, the incubator program offers mentoring, resources, and many other benefits. Participants seeking admission in this program need to apply for consideration. If selected, the program places the participant in a group with other attorneys starting their own practice. The Incubator program lasts for one year and begins with daily meetings to cover important topics necessary to start your practice. These topics include business planning, business structures, banking and IOLTA, insurance needs, marketing plans, office needs, software and practice management systems, and other applicable topics. The presentations are given by professionals, including accountants, bankers, and experienced attorneys who have opened their own practice. The presentations are an opportunity to network and obtain important contacts. The educational trainings also include sessions with judges who provide tips from the bench. Each Friday, the Incubator program meets together for a roundtable discussion with the other participants and the Practice Management Advisor. This event is an opportunity to ask questions and give advice to one another.

Other benefits of the Incubator program include furnished office space in the state bar's Las Vegas and Reno offices, access to free CLE, and support from the state bar's business partners. If you have a desire to hang your own shingle, joining the Incubator program is a great way to decrease the associated risks.

Learning Resources – Free CLE

The Handle|Bar program also offers interactive guided tutorials. Each tutorial is 30-45 minutes and qualifies for CLE credit. The guided tutorials include *Attorney Well-Being: It's More Than a State of Mind* (0.5 AAMH CLE credits), *Client-Lawyer Relationships: Tips to Ethically Connect and Communicate* (0.5 Ethics CLE credits), *Client Trust Accounts* (0.5 Ethics CLE credits), *Conflicts of Interest- Ensuring Undivided Loyalty* (0.5 Ethics CLE credits), and *Fees, Costs & Billing: Your Guide to Getting Paid Ethically* (0.5 Ethics CLE credits).

The modules make learning law practice management and your ethical obligations easy. As you work through the interactive guided tutorials, you will apply the knowledge you have gained through hypothetical scenarios and related multiple-choice quizzes, and you will earn CLE free of charge.

The Handle|Bar Website

The resources on the Handle|Bar section of the state bar's website are separated into four different sections. Each section includes access to resources offered at no cost or discounted prices.

Start Your Practice

Some of the guides and tools found in this section include a checklist for starting a law practice, a new business checklist from the Nevada Secretary of State, a guide to obtain a State Business License, and IOLTA information. This section also includes an IOLTA enrollment form. CLE is also offered in this section to help establish and develop a new legal practice, to walk through the necessary steps for set up and use of an IOLTA, and to avoid ethical pitfalls of everyday law office computing.

The most important asset to your new business will be you as the managing attorney. Therefore, there are also important links to help with health and well-being, including a 20-minute mindfulness webinar titled, *Finding Ease During Uncertainty.* The health and well-being category can also be found with helpful tips on other pages of the website.

Manage Your Practice

Once you have started your practice, it is time to get to work. Sometimes the simplest tasks can take a lot more time than they should. This section should help you save time and money with forms and practice tools available at the click of a button. The list of forms includes a sample intake form, a sample engagement letter, sample nonengagement letter, sample disengagement letter, sample closing letter, and sample conflict waivers. These pages also include a file-closing checklist and sample confidentiality agreements. You can also find article links, CLE links, podcasts, and health and well-being tips here.

Protect Your Practice

It is important to protect your practice after you have worked hard to build it. The practice of law is becoming increasingly virtual, and with the increased use of online services, the risks of potential breaches has increased. It is important to be aware of these risks and protect against them. This section provides information on how to prepare for the worst and mitigate your risk. You will find guides for cybersecurity best practices and disaster-preparedness resources. This section also includes various articles with helpful information to help protect your practice including: *Insecurity Abroad: Data Safety for Practitioners When Away From the Office*, *How to Minimize the Risk of Becoming a Victim of Wire Fraud, No Good Deed Goes Unpunished,* and *Password Insecurity – Lessons from a Personal Story.*

Transition Your Practice

Over time there may be reason to merge your firm, split your firm, or wind down your practice. This section provides a practice-closing checklist, a checklist to close with the Nevada Secretary of State, and a Succession Planning Resource Guide. Many questions arise regarding the closing of a practice, whether it is for retirement or for changing directions in life. This section helps to make that transition smooth.

Are You Considering Starting Your Own Practice?

I have had the opportunity to talk with many lawyers who want to start their own practice or have recently started their own practice. Opening a law firm is different than opening many other businesses; there are unique challenges and issues associated with starting a law firm, but if it is something you feel the desire to do, it is possible. And it is not something that you have to do alone. The state bar has resources and help so that you can have the best chance for success in the future. If you are pondering starting a practice, take the decision seriously. Do your research and reach out and speak to other attorneys about the decision. Review the resources listed above and give yourself the best chance for long-term success.

SHAIN MANUELE is the State Bar of Nevada's practice management advisor in the Handle|BAR program.