

## Seeking Advice for Going Solo

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I'm a law student interested in going solo following law school. Beginning my third year in the fall. I've drawn up a business and marketing plan and have local DC attorneys and friends that have graduated from MBA programs reviewing my plan and the numbers.

I'm interested in receiving advice and hearing about your experience as solo attorneys. How did you make your practice successful? Also, if there are any DC attorneys on the listserv, I'd love to speak more with you one-on-one.

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Did you introduce yourself per the administrivia requirements? If not time to enter you appearance per the rules. If I just missed your introduction my apologies.

It's never too early to start planning. That said any idea where you wish to practice? Next any idea what types of law do you want to practice? Family, Civil, Criminal, real estate and gas & oil are some possibilities.

Now some will tell you you can't hang a shingle right out of law school. I did then again I was 50. Yes I had an MBA. I also have a FLMI, a CNE and I used to hold a 3rd Class Radio license with Broadcast endorsement. I had also run the law school VITA program for 4 years which was good practice I got to deal with clients.

So you have a plan. You mean I was supposed to have a plan? I believe what Paul Newman said about plans in launching Newman's own. The second we have a plan we're screwed.

So say I'm an unbalanced whack and that the only people who talk to me are the Tip Staff. All I know is that despite everything I've survive 2 heart attacks and almost 9 years of practicing law. Further although I may not wear suits as much as other lawyers. I'm still here. is provided by the ABA's Solo, Small Firm & General Practice Division and its members.

{John}

John A. Davidson, Pennsylvania

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Basically, I stand on the corner with a sign that reads: TAX ATTORNEY - WILL WORK FOR FOOD, DRINK OR ANY FORM OF MONEY

I also try to look pitiful. It helps.

Greg Zbylut, California

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Greg, must you copy me?

Steven Chung, California

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And I am thinking that I should get into the brain-surgery business on my free weekends. I realize that you can practice law for the public as soon as you are licensed by the state. But I am old-school. Law is my second profession; I graduated from law school and passed the bar at age 47. I didn't know anything about what was required of me as a lawyer. I could read the law. I could interpret the law as I read it. But all of the things that went into the practice of law I learned as a junior associate to an experienced attorney.

I urge you to spend at least 12 to 18 months working for someone with 8 or more years of experience in the area of law that interests you. You will get into less trouble and be of more help to your clients if you do so.

Curtis D. Drew, Arizona

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Great advice. There's no substitute for even this limited length of experience.

Richard Bryan, New York

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Run from the MBAs. They are no help. Read Jay Foonberg's book. Then, figure out if you can find clients. If no, then stop and go to work for someone. If yes, then figure out where they are located and where you will be going to court and find an office you can rent cheaply near one of those locations (an office suite kind of place with other lawyers around.). Simple formula. Grow it from there. You sound like you have the drive to make it work. Good luck. Remember what some famous solo told me when I graduated from law school and opened my own practice, "At least when you work for yourself, you get to decide WHICH 80 hours of the week you want to work."

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Georgia

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## SoloSez Popular Threads, July 2014

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When I started practicing I was somewhat miffed that the legal secretary in the firm made more money than I did. It didn't help any when I realized that they were more valuable to the firm than I was.

Jim Pardue, North Carolina

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Great advice, and in an ideal world, that is probably the choice of most; how many jobs are available where a newly minted lawyer can do that? Failing that, there are many CLEs to teach the ropes, and the bar associations are offering mentoring. We older lawyers can also hold a hand out to the newer lawyers, as many of us on this list do .

Miriam N. Jacobson, Pennsylvania

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If you can find a job with a good small firm, take it. One of the toughest things about starting your own firm is having access to capital. Live as cheaply as possible for a couple of years and sock away six months of living expenses (again, planning on living as cheaply as possible). You'll learn some law, develop some contacts, decide if you do or don't like a given practice area, watch how other attorneys run a business (or how they AREN'T running a business) and get a better sense of who you are and who you want to be as a lawyer. THEN head off on your own.

Good luck!

Sasha Golden, Massachusetts

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Give us a word or two on your practice area(s). if you're planning on running a public interest enviro practice (looking at your sig) feel free to let me know if you have questions.

Plenty of attorneys go solo after passing the bar out of necessity. I'd recommend finding a mentor or three in your practice areas who can show you the procedural ropes early on. Having a good network of mentors can turn three hours of research into a 2 minute conversation. That's far more important than having an MBA review your plan/numbers IMO.

Good luck!

Jordan Beckett, Oregon

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## SoloSez Popular Threads, July 2014

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I worked under an experienced solo for almost a year. The plan was for me to get my feet under me and help him with a heavy caseload before striking out on my own. The pay wasn't great, but enough to save a little.

The plan worked to perfection and now the older attorney is a great mentor and referral source.

Marshall D. Chriswell, Pennsylvania

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I would also throw out the business plans. I don't think that will do all that much good. Running a law practice, in my humble opinion, is much different than any other type of business, and does not lend itself well to a set business plan. Adaptation to the course your practice takes you on is one of the more important things in my opinion.

Nick Bowers, New York

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I agree with Miriam about older attorneys serving as mentors. If you plan on doing something that involves court appearances, I would see if there is an American Inns of Court chapter within driving distance, even if it is in far-off Cleveland. Generally, a Chapter meets once a month except in the summer. The "model" chapter consists of "pupilages" of eight with several pupilages in each chapter. In our first year as a chapter we had eight pupilages with eight licensed professionals in each; one judge, two attorneys with more than ten years of practice, and the rest with less than ten years (or something like that- it was a long time ago). We would meet once a month for nine months for dinner; during each meeting one of the pupilages would give a presentation related to law, ethics, or litigation. We received CLE credits for attending and additional credits if we were involved in making the presentation.

In attending the meetings I learned an awful lot about what was expected of me in court by both judges and opposing counsel. I received some referrals, but not many. I found attorneys I could call for help if needed. And I made a lot of friends. Also, about ten or twelve of my fellow members became judges in the state trial courts, the state appellate courts, and the federal courts; that didn't hurt me at all.

Curtis D. Drew

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This is definitely not an easy thing to do, but it can be done. Law was a second career for me and I ended up going solo right away never having worked for a firm. I think the important thing was that it was a second career so I knew business pretty well. I too have a business plan that I continually follow and update every 6 months at a minimum. I find that what is good about having a business plan is that it keeps me focused on what I originally envisioned for my law firm.

Where I differ from a lot of people is that I am married and have a spouse who can support me. this takes a lot of pressure off of me. Having said

## SoloSez Popular Threads, July 2014

that though within the first 6 months I had paid back the money I had borrowed from myself and was in the black. That is all due to my networking and getting to know other attorneys and gaining their confidence so that I could obtain referrals from them.

Going solo is a kind of hard work but you can do it if you're willing to put in the time and effort and get to know plenty of people who are willing to share forms and share their knowledge and show you the ropes. It's been my experience with the attorneys that I've encountered that they are more than willing to share their knowledge and help me out.

And, of course, I love this list serve. I'm on another list serve in Illinois that is really great as well its specific to my practice area and is great for staying abreast of current developments. Best of luck to you know that it really can be done it just takes a lot of hard work. And it's easy to work hard and work a lot hours when you're working for yourself.

Letisha Luecking Orlet, Illinois

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- Jay Foonberg is the GURU. Get your hands on all his books and CDs DVDs.

<http://foonberglaw.com/>

Call me anytime and I would be happy to guide you.

Warm regards,

Mo Syed, District of Columbia

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Someone said "run from the MBAs." I hope they didn't include us BBAs in that analysis.

Planning is important, not useless. Just be prepared to toss the plan as you gain more information. Read The Art of the Start for more info on business planning - best guide I know. Foonberg - Great books. Read them.

Do you have management experience? No? Run something next year and get it. Sales? No? Sit at someone's table and start asking people to buy something - or give blood.

Under 30? I'd honestly suggest you wait to start your office.

Um, there's probably more but you have a lot to read through here. Feel free to contact me if you have more questions.

Sincerely,  
Dwayne Allen Thomas, New York

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## SoloSez Popular Threads, July 2014

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MBA's have turned into nothing more than your BBA degree enhanced marginally and it is designed towards working in big business. BBA's are great and help one understand the inter-relationships between the various duties necessary to operate a small business.

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr.

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I love Foonberg and paid homage to him here - <http://abovethelaw.com/2013/12/foonberg-was-first/>. So I don't mean disrespect. But there are other more up to date books on starting a firm.

For example, the ABA just released an updated version of Flying Solo and I and several other sezzers have chapters in that book. And my book, Solo by Choice, is finally available in Kindle format - [http://www.amazon.com/Solo-Choice-Second-Lawyer-Always-ebook/dp/B00KXL163G/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1404400308&sr=8-4&keywords=carolyn+elefant](http://www.amazon.com/Solo-Choice-Second-Lawyer-Always-ebook/dp/B00KXL163G/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1404400308&sr=8-4&keywords=carolyn+elefant) (or print on demand). A third and final update is in progress.\

BTW, Zach, I am in DC and I do energy and increasingly, a considerable amount of environmental work. I'd love to have a younger affiliate to work with on some of these matters which are critical but also no longer cost-effective for me. Right now, I have two appeals of a water quality certificate and a Clean Air act certificate (with interesting legal issue) about to move forward in Maryland courts, along with more NEPA cases than you could ever want. Give me a call if you are around this summer - I'd be happy to put you to work..

Carolyn Elefant, District of Columbia

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Jump on that offer. Even if you had to pay her for the experience it would be worth it.

Roger Traversa, Pennsylvania

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Actually, the MBA came first, as a way to give people who did not have prior business experience an education in business. The BBA was introduced much later - and yes, you're right, there's not much difference in the programs. That doesn't make a person with an MBA useless by default, though.

Sincerely,  
Dwayne Allen Thomas

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I hate to rain on your parade, but I lived in metro DC several years prior to and during law school, and it seems every third person in DC and its suburbs is a lawyer. I don't know the stats, but I'd guess the metro DC area probably has the highest per capita number of attorneys. Now, lots and lots and lots of those folks work for the government or for large firms doing highly specialized work. And you didn't mention what your intended practice area was, which matters. But, I think you need to do a pretty deep analysis of the market to determine if you could be competitive. Is there enough demand vs supply?

I loved living in DC, but I specifically took a big firm job elsewhere for a variety of reasons. But at the time (2000's), the local market just seemed oversaturated with lawyers. In the smallish town I practice in these days...not so much. There is competition, and my hourly rate is much lower than it would be elsewhere (it is actually the same as my 1st year associate rate at BigLaw). But my biggest problem these days is trying to hire staff and attorneys to adequately address the workload and maintain the quality of life I want.

Now, if Carolyn's offer had been on the table, I probably wouldn't have moved (at the time I had a pretty deep environmental background in my engineering career).

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida

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Cynthia's right. I forgot about that. 803 lawyers for every 10,000 residents in DC. 1 out of 12 people.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/31/dc-has-nations-highest-co\\_n\\_1067215.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/31/dc-has-nations-highest-co_n_1067215.html)

Sincerely,  
Dwayne Allen Thomas

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