

What is a "True Solo"?

I've seen several folks refer to themselves as being a "true solo".

I always thought this as strange. Why does not having support staff make one a "true solo"? I have numerous support staff and still consider myself a "true solo" until I hire an attorney.

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It's merely the distinction that I have nobody to delegate or defer to, nobody to blame, no resource at-hand for load balancing. I'm not merely the sole attorney in the office, I'm the sole person in the office.

It's on the one hand a much more flexible arrangement, but at the same time, a far less flexible arrangement.

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr., North Carolina

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The life of a true solo is radically different that the life of someone with a lot of support staff. You need to do it all, from drafting to mailing. I think it's a larger change from "no staff" to "staff" than it is from "staff" to "staff and associate".

Erik Hammarlund, Massachusetts

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Yeah, I can't even blame any mistakes on the "secretary". :- ) ( and please, don't take umbrage – I once was a secretary and have the greatest of respect for them. )

Miriam Jacobson, Pennsylvania

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I'm intrigued by those who operate with no staff. To me that is a huge inefficiency. I rate my time at \$400 an hour. If I'm spending an hour stuffing envelopes and answering routine calls, then I am being inefficient. I could have paid someone \$12.00 an hour for 33 hours to make up for the "opportunity cost" of that lost hour.

Nick A. Ortiz, Florida

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I can only comment that when you have an absolutely full plate, with 100% of chargeable, billable time . . . you are so right. When, on the other hand, you may be down to one or two matters, your services as a "stuffer" are overpaid.

Joseph C. Melino, California

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That varies by practice area.

I know people who run large firms with few attorneys--real estate closings, bankruptcy, etc. This is a great idea, largely because the similarity of each client allows a high degree of efficiency on the part of their staff. Other practices have little repetition and are less amenable to staff.

Erik Hammarlund

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I couldn't pay a kid \$12 per hour around here. Anyone with any experience is going to cost a LOT more than that in CA. And that time "stuffing" envelopes, is time I am talking to my kids, or listening to music, or watching a soccer game or doing any one of a number of things that I enjoy more than practicing law.

It isn't just about how much money you can make. If we were all trying to maximize our income, most of us would go work at firms. I have had offers for significantly more than I make now. And I turn them all down. Because, when my daughter has 2 days of Nutcracker shows on a Thursday and a Friday, I don't have to worry about staff, or if people are doing their jobs. My voice mail will say I am out of the office, I will check emails, and I will be working backstage as security to keep her, and all of the other kids, safe.

It is a tradeoff. If you want to maximize your income, you should go read Ben Glass' work on marketing. If you want different things out of the practice of law, then no staff may be the way to go.

Jonathan Stein, California

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And then there is the happy medium. I pay \$350 per month for Gabbyville, which answers all of my calls, schedules phone calls back/appointments/hearings/mediations on my website via Acuity Scheduling, makes calls for me on demand, and screens all of the marketers. I have a virtual paralegal who drafts documents and creates/manages workflows and document templates. I have a runner who gets my mail, files pleadings, delivers documents and acts as a mobile notary. All the while I have an office share in my husband's firm for a minimal cost. It's the best of all worlds for a solo with a caseload around 45 family court matters.

Suzanne Hawkins

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I don't have a staff. I had a staff of one for a year. It started out promising, but turned out not to be working as well as I had hoped, or as it initially appeared. In a word, in a small office, personality is critical.

When I let that staff go, I found myself "behind the 8-ball"; I had increased my case load to a point that left me insufficient time to hire someone new, and strapped for cash flow because I spent nearly two months auditing my entire active case load (and a few seemingly closed matters) to discover that the staff had had more problems than I realized, and there was a period of non-productive clean-up. So, now I need to get "over the hump" to be back where I have the reserves to bring someone back on-board and allow for an acclimation and ramp-up period to cover the cost with their contribution.

So, while I want to have one or two people working with me to give me more capacity and flexibility, circumstances right now don't support that. I don't imagine wanting to get much bigger than that, because then the staff can become a hindrance or burden, creating more pressure to keep making rain, maintaining a certain case load, etc., and impairing the flexibility I want.

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr.

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