

FLYING SOLO OR FLYING WITH A CO-PILOT THE GROWTH OF A LAW PRACTICE

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By Derek A. DeBrosse

I never wanted to practice law on my own – I always felt having a law partner or partners was a value added benefit not only to myself but my clients as well. When I started my solo practice everything was new and frightening to me – mostly because I was alone. Looking back upon my progression into the practice of law I would not change the path I have taken for anything, I am pleased where I have arrived and how I arrived here. Over these past three years of practice I have been approached many times with the prospects of partnership. I was even in discussions with a law school classmate about partnership when I first began looking at office space. It took me a little over three years to know that the time was right to expand into a different type of law practice. Beginning this year, my solo practice became a law partnership and thus far everything is going as planned.

My experience in making this leap has been one of cautious optimism. There are a few pieces of advice that I held very close to the chest as I began to build my practice. I believe if any other practitioners are considering expanding their practice, these tips could prove useful.

A Law Partnership is a Marriage.

This above all else influenced how I approached my decision for partnership in the practice of law. I had many occasions where I was approached by attorneys, and I just knew it was not the right time. Either our personalities did not mesh or our worldviews were so diametrically opposed that a business relationship would be doomed from the start. I soon discovered that I had to be satisfied at my present station in my practice in order to grow and expand. I realized I could not force a business relationship to occur – it needed to occur organically as most things in a successful business do.

When I finally decided to make the jump into a law partnership it occurred with a discussion over a drink. I had never even considered the law partnership idea going into that particular discussion – however we both soon realized that our worldviews, desires, and philosophies with regards to the practice of law worked well together.

We spent the next seven to nine months having simple meetings to discuss the mere possibility of a law partnership. Clearly, I did not jump right into anything. I had spent three years building my practice, and I needed to be sure this was the right move. Once we had both come to a place where we were satisfied with learning everything we could about the other, we decided to put everything into writing.

Plan for the Divorce as you planned for the Marriage.

Once we were ready to put everything on paper, the most difficult part was how to plan for a potential split. Far too many businesses find themselves in trouble when they fail to accept the fact that it simply does not work out. After a month or so of discussion, both my law partner and I came to mutually agreeable terms as to how to handle particular situations in the event things simply failed to work. The importance of these discussions was more than simple planning. They were an assurance that I had chosen to enter into a business relationship with someone who was willing to discuss the difficult issues and to address them in a rational, logical and reasonable manner. If a law partner does not want to discuss such topics the business relationship may be doomed from the start.

Take Things a Day at a Time.

Finally, once everything was on paper, it was time to start practicing law. Although it may be stressful at times, if it is a well thought out and well planned decision it can also be the best decision ever made. I already have seen our business begin to grow by expanding into new practice areas. I have been able to reduce some of the work-related stress by leveraging myself against my law partner. As we have progressed forward, we simply take each day at a time and address each concern as it comes. We have made it a point to never try and do everything all at once. There is far too much to be done and far too little time in a single day.

Overall, expanding into a business relationship has so far been an excellent choice for my practice. As with any business decision, however, it can be subjective depending on numerous aspects. If an attorney at least considers the above points he or she will be far better off than simply jumping head first into the very first offer of partnership that comes along.



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