

“Juggling Family Law” – Keeping Files in the Air While Moving Your Practice at a Comfortable Heart Rate

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The practice of family law is unique and requires a lawyer who has a combination of legal skills and strong interpersonal skills. Junior family law counsel need to develop good practice management skills early on before bad habits develop while senior practitioners need to take a step back, have a hard look at the habits they continuously fall into and make an effort to improve their practice management skills. How do we juggle all our various files and keep our practice moving forward while minimizing stress and having a life outside the office? An impossible task perhaps? Let's give it a try.

THE BIG PICTURE

Planning Your Career

Be very purposeful about planning your career. Ask yourself important questions about what you enjoy about your work, the people you want to work with, the kinds of referrals you want to receive and where you hope to be in 5, 10, 15 years. Constantly improve your knowledge in family law by reading, going to seminars, observing, writing, teaching and making every assignment a learning experience. Take an active role in setting goals, learning from your mistakes and developing your career.

Take the time to think about how to make yourself indispensable to your firm. If you are a junior member of the bar, find out what your organization values and deliver it. If you are a senior practitioner, be a leader on your firm's values and a role model to your peers. No matter what stage in your career, it is important to promote the interests of the organization as a whole. Be cautious of joining the counter-culture and remember how easy it is to complain about things and how much harder it is to work towards making improvements. Marketing yourself internally can be as important as marketing yourself externally and is as basic as being nice to the people you work with.

Your persona as a family lawyer is everything you do in your professional capacity, (examples are your level of assertiveness, your body language, expressions, your clothing, your vocabulary and all of your actions). You need to develop this and embrace it. Know yourself and how you present to the outside world. When you are developing your legal persona, it is important to look to the leaders of the bar to figure out how you should act. If the fundamental values of the leaders in your family law bar are different from yours, it may be a struggle. Find someone you can look up to and model your practice accordingly. It is key to find an organization in which you can practice law in a manner that is consistent with your basic goals and values.

In the practice of family law, there may be times when it is difficult to cope with the stresses that come from the conflict between core values and day to day work activities. Be aware of this and