

## Business & Careers

# Growing your firm presents new challenges



**Gary Mitchell**  
**The Coach**

It's one thing to go out on your own and create your own solo practice, but it's another to build a firm. It's a lot of chicken egg, but I advise my clients to prepare for the fact you will grow.

The first step would be to create a plan that would include target market research, competitive intelligence, talent sourcing and location of office space. Since you will be hiring, is a move necessary?

The plan should also include a SWOT analysis—a structured planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in a project or business venture—and goals for 10 years, five years, two years and one year.

The next step is to go through a branding

exercise with a reputable marketing company that has worked in the legal field.

Your brand is more than a logo. It's story about your firm, your values and how you approach serving your clients. Your brand will also include your new firm name.

The trend over the past couple years has been to stay away from 'James McKinney LLP' and move to a name that says who you are and what you do. Some examples include "Cornerstone Law" for a construction firm and "Heritage Law" for a family law firm.

When choosing a name, conduct a Google and trademark search to ensure it's not already taken. Choose something short and easy to read (as above).

The other value to this approach is that you are creating a brand that will be easier to sell down the road without your name on it.

Now, you're ready to create your marketing materials, website, stationary, business cards, etc. Again, work with web designers who have at least had some experience working with law firms.

As you hire new people, it's wise to ensure they all become part of your business development strategy. After all, it's better to have five

or six people out there drumming up business than just yourself. Make sure incentives are in place to motivate your people to want to get out there. Provide training and support to help them succeed.

Delegation is also important. Make sure your time is primarily spent billing the work and generating it. Most other tasks should be delegated to non-fee earners. And all fee-earners should follow the same model including your law clerks.

A law clerk I worked with a couple of years ago increased her dockets by 20 per cent over the course of one year while being engaged in business development and bringing in three times the value of the coaching program at the same time. She did this by delegating non-billable task to assistants. This is how you become and stay more profitable.

The newest generation of talent possess a number of traits that can help run and grow your firm. They want to be a part of the action, they want to be mentored, they like to be a part of teams, they are hungry for knowledge and they are tech savvy. All of these traits can be harnessed to help grow your firm.

You should also create a mentoring program as you bring on a younger talent pool. The more up to speed your staff is, the better your clients will be served. My suggestion here is to let people pair up themselves keeping it more organic.

Once you've hired your initial staff, you have the opportunity of creating a culture where people love to come to work. You do this with regular communication to your team and with some individual focus, going and seeing your people individually from time-to-time. Build in rewards and bonuses not just for individuals so when the team succeeds, they all succeed.

Let people work from home from time to time, or offer flexible work hours. Remember, a lot of your talent pool would have come from the larger firms that don't allow this kind of flexibility.

One last note: don't try and do it all by yourself. Enlist other professionals.

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