

Before You Get Started

I. Write the Vision (Habakkuk 2:2—write the vision make it plain)

1. Questions to Ask:

- i. Is this the right move for me? My family?
- ii. What do you want your firm to look like?
- iii. How many lawyers?
- iv. What areas will you practice?
- v. Where do you want your firm to be 5 years from now? 10 years?
- vi. What is your target market? Ideal client?

2. Count the Costs!

- i. Assess how much you will need for start-up costs
 - a. Office space (Location! Location! Location!)
 - b. Office Equipment (Printer/Scanner)
 - c. Marketing
 - a. Business cards
 - b. Website
 - c. Social Media
 - d. Salary—don't forget you!
- ii. Develop a budget for operating expenses
 - a. Phone/Fax Services (including answering services)
 - b. Internet
 - c. Email (please obtain a domain—it's more professional)
 - d. Legal Software (i.e., Clio, MyCase, etc.)
 - a. Be sure it does conflicts checks!
 - e. Accounting Software (Xero, Quickbooks, etc.)/Bookkeeper
 - f. Merchant Services (accepting online payments) (i.e., LawPay)
 - g. Alacourt
 - h. Office Supplies (paper, pens, envelopes, stationery, postage, files, etc.)
 - i. Marketing

- j. Insurance
 - a. MALPRACTICE—get you some!
 - b. General Business (if you have a physical location)
 - c. Disability/Life
 - iii. Check the State Bar for Resources! <https://www.alabar.org/programs/pmap/>
 - a. The PMAP (Practice Management Assistance Program) serves as a clearinghouse for the collection and dissemination of information about the effective management of the contemporary law office. The program was created to serve the needs of solo practitioners and lawyers practicing in small firms, and to protect the public from lawyers whose management skills are inadequate to allow them to deliver competent legal services in a timely manner.
 - b. Space (for those close to Montgomery)—Meeting Rooms/Depositions
 - iv. Alabama Supreme Court (for those close to Montgomery)—Free Westlaw!
- 3. Be prepared for feast/famine as they both may come
 - i. Highly recommend putting yourself on a salary!
 - ii. Don't forget about taxes!!!
 - a. AL Business Privilege Tax
 - b. Income taxes and self-employment (Uncle Sam & Uncle AL)

Getting Started

II. Open Your Law Firm

- 1. File appropriate documents to establish firm as a business entity (Secretary of State)
- 2. Obtain an EIN (Employer Identification Number)
<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/employer-id-numbers>
- 3. Open bank accounts (Operating & Trust accounts)
 - i. Do not mix personal and business funds!!! Your business is a separate individual!

4. For multi-attorney firms be sure you have a partnership/shareholder agreement
5. Obtain Important Documents
 - i. Fee Agreements (your malpractice insurance company will provide samples)
 - ii. Letterhead
 - iii. Letter Templates (i.e., update, closeout)
 - iv. Motion/Document Templates (dependent upon areas of practice)

Building/Growing

III. Expand Your Network

1. Of other attorneys
 - i. You cannot practice law on an island!
 - ii. Have a list of attorneys you can call who have expertise in your areas of practice
 - iii. Work cases with other attorneys (reduces liability and helps you learn from more experienced attorneys)
 - iv. Establish relationships with the business community
2. Of people in the community
 - i. Attend events/functions
 - ii. Speak at various events (schools/churches)

IV. Generating Revenue

1. Balance your practice areas (long money, short money, easy money, hard money)
2. Don't be married to the profession!
 - i. You can make money in various ways that do not require you to have a license.
 - ii. Think outside of the box and don't just fall into practicing in areas that are common. (The riches are in the niches!)
 - iii. Don't see yourself as a lawyer who happens to own a business, see yourself as a business owner who happens to be a lawyer
3. Don't let family or random people dictate how you should be living!