

Member Spotlight

What I've Learned About Solo Practice

By Lawrence Ebner

In 2016, after 42 years at what had morphed into a global law firm with thousands of lawyers, I made a decision that many lawyers would consider risky: I went solo, and at the age of 69, launched my own Washington, D.C.-based appellate boutique in a city teeming with high-profile appellate lawyers. A decade later, I have no regrets—and a more educated view of what full-time solo practice really means, especially for us Baby Boomers who have no desire to retire.

“Solo” Practice is a Misnomer

Feeling isolated was my greatest fear. But instead, solo practice has enabled me to expand my professional network *enormously*. I have great admiration for highly skilled appellate specialists in large practice groups. For me, however, working within the bubble of a multi-practice international law firm was actually quite confining.

As a solo practitioner, I have burst that bubble. Solo practice has broadened my professional horizon and perspective. It has helped me cultivate professional relationships throughout the United States and afforded me opportunities to mentor younger attorneys with personal backgrounds different than mine.

I now interact continually with numerous attorneys at law firms of all sizes. I also have the freedom to devote as much time as I choose to leadership roles in DRI and other professional organizations. Unlike working in a large firm, I do not need anyone's approval to attend professional meetings or seminars. Because registration fees and travel expenses come out of my own pocket, I value participation in such activities even more than when my former firm was picking up the tab.

Solo Practice is Fulfilling

Since hanging out my own shingle, I have received greater professional recognition than while at a large firm. This includes, for example, becoming a fellow of the American Academy of Appellate Lawyers, receiving DRI's Tom Segalla Excellence in Education Award, and being selected as a Washington, D.C. appellate Super Lawyer 9 years in a row.

More importantly, six years ago I accepted an offer to wear a second professional hat as Executive Vice President & General Counsel of the Atlantic Legal Foundation, a venerable, nonprofit, free-enterprise advocacy organization. Without question this has been the capstone of my legal career. I conduct ALF's amicus program, including writing most of its Supreme Court amicus briefs, with the benefit of a distinguished board and advisory council, including ALF Chairman & President Hayward D. Fisk, an extraordinary colleague with whom I interact almost

daily. I could not have undertaken this tremendously satisfying professional and personal opportunity prior to becoming a solo practitioner.

Solo Practice is Fun

Running my own law firm means that I get to do it all, ranging from maintaining financial records to managing social media. I have become tech savvy. This includes keeping my law firm website and LinkedIn page up to date with my amicus briefs, articles, and presentations. As an adjunct to my work for ALF, I also have launched an online newsletter, *All Things Amicus*, which covers the waterfront on strategizing, writing, and filing amicus briefs.

Enjoying my private office near the White House in a shared office suite with other professionals has helped me maintain my 5-days per week work routine. I'm not knocking home offices; I have one too. But for me, part of the fun of solo practice is being a physical part of the D.C. legal community.

Solo Practice has no Age Limit

After more than four decades at my former law firm, I launched my solo practice at an age when many of my peers are retiring. Choosing to retire is fine. At my solo-practice firm, however, there is no mandatory retirement age or transition to senior status. In fact, given the steady stream of challenging amicus briefs that I write for ALF on a great variety of important legal issues, I think that my appellate advocacy skills are better honed now than ever.

Solo Practice Offers True Autonomy

There is no management committee or practice group leader looking over my shoulder. My conflict checks are quick and simple. I set my own flat fees for appellate litigation services and don't have to worry about billable hours, utilization, realization, leverage, business origination, profits per partner, or an annual chat about my "metrics" with the compensation committee. Partner meetings are conducted inside my head. I don't have to travel to partner retreats and endure high-priced consultants' briefings about the latest trends in the global legal "industry." And there is no water-cooler gossip at my solo-practice firm.

Solo practice has its own set of challenges and is not for everyone. But as a proud member of the legal profession, I can attest that going solo can be an attractive option for seasoned lawyers who seek more autonomy.



Lawrence Ebner is founder of *Capital Appellate Advocacy PLLC* and Executive Vice President & General Counsel of the *Atlantic Legal Foundation*. He is immediate past chair of the DRI Center for Law & Public Policy, and vice chair of the Appellate Advocacy Committee.