

Set Priorities. Build a Practice. Gain Autonomy.

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[Jay Harrington Content Marketing, Branding](#)

Numerous studies show that autonomy is the number one predictor of happiness and satisfaction in life and in work.

To be autonomous is to gain more control over your circumstances, your decisions and your time.

There are a number of ways to gain autonomy in our careers, and it doesn't require making the leap to entrepreneurship. As a lawyer, you don't have to hang a shingle. Within a law firm, you can gain more independence by building your own practice.

Having clients of your own is important for many reasons. A loyal stable of clients is the most valuable form of career currency that a lawyer can have. A lawyer with clients is not only a valued asset in their own firm, they are attractive to others as well.

Clients create leverage for lawyers because there's value in having others working on your matters. You'll be freed up to devote more time to develop more business, and you'll get a piece of the revenue others generate when they do work for your clients.

At most firms, having a book of business (or at least demonstrating a strong ability to develop one) is a prerequisite to making partner. It increases compensation. Most important, it's empowering, because you're no longer reliant upon others for work.

This begs an obvious question: If building a profitable book of business is so important, then why don't more lawyers prioritize it, let alone accomplish it?

The problem is not one of knowledge. Most of us know what we need to be doing, at least in theory. It's not one of desire. Lawyers want the benefits that come with building a book of business. The problem is one of action—or, in this case, lack of it. We equivocate and procrastinate, despite knowing how important it is for us to act.

I'm not immune to this challenge. None of us are. We all face a barrage of urgent issues on a daily basis that pull us off track from what we know, deep down, we should be focusing on.

Whenever I find myself pushing off something important because "I don't have the time," I try to remind myself that I have time—the same time as everyone else—and that the real issue is that I need to take a closer look at how I'm utilizing my time.

At its root, it's not a time-management issue. It's about priorities.

Every decision involves trade-offs. And if "I don't have the time," it means that I've decided to prioritize something else. As Stephen Covey points out, "The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

Take Control

If you're a lawyer who finds it hard to focus on important-but-not-urgent issues such as marketing and business development, you're not alone. In all my years coaching lawyers (and being one myself), it's become clear that it is a consistent and pervasive challenge.

Most of us have a tendency to tackle less-important tasks with shorter deadlines than more-important tasks with longer deadlines.

It's called the "mere urgency effect."

Marketing and business development can be even more challenging because it's often not subject to a deadline.

The first step in overcoming this tendency is recognizing it.

Step two is putting yourself on a deadline.

If building a legal practice is important to you, then start making time to focus on marketing and business development.

You're capable of moving mountains when a client calls with an urgent request. Start bringing the same sense of urgency to your own priorities.

- Create a business development goal
- Break your goal down into bite-size chunks
- Identify 1-3 objectives for your week
- Block time on your calendar to get the work done
- Keep going

Again, having your own book of business is satisfying, creates autonomy, and increases compensation. But it won't happen without consistent effort.

Make yourself your most important priority. Start treating yourself as your own most important client.

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