
THE PRACTICE MANAGER

A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER PROVIDED BY THE LAW OFFICE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OF THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS
WEEK OF January 3, 2005

WE HAVE MOVED: VISIT US AT OUR NEW WEBSITE – www.TexasBarLOM.com

Law Office Management Update

Orlando Lopez

The Law Office Management Program has hit the floor running in 2005 with a few new programs.

First of all, this month will see the debut of two new programs, How to Organize and Manage Your Litigation Practice and How to Organize and Manage Your Employment Law Practice. Both courses examine the intricacies of operating a litigation and employment practice respectively by focusing on client development, work production, financial management and technology. Both courses will take place in San Antonio but on different dates and different locations. Please see our list of upcoming events on page 4 for more details.

Our next program, or series of programs, is a joint venture with local bar associations. We are making available to all local bar associations a video series that can be presented to their respective groups, which consists of our “How to Organize and Manage Your ___ Practice.” Local Bar leaders may choose from such practice areas as family, criminal, estate planning, real estate, etc. This can either be simply a video-only seminar or a combination video/live seminar where we arrange for local attorneys to address questions and share their thoughts and experiences with the audience in addition to the showing of the video.

If you are a local bar leader and are interested, please call our office at 800-204-2222, ext. 1300 to schedule. Otherwise call your local bar leader and encourage them to call us to schedule.

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The Coach’s Corner

Debra Bruce, JD, PCC

Secrets to Actually Accomplishing Your Goals



It’s the start of a new year. Time to set new resolutions and goals that, if history is a predictor, will be off track and broken by the end of February, despite our best intentions now. Want to make this year different?

Let’s take a look at why our goal setting hasn’t worked in the past, and what we can do about it.

Not Our Goals

One reason why we often fail to accomplish our goals is that they weren’t really *our* goals in the first place. They were “shoulds” impressed on us by our spouses, parents, children, business partners, or society in general. So ask yourself, “I want this goal *for the sake of what?*” Why do I want this? If it’s to get my spouse off my back, I might be better served by choosing a more direct goal for improving my relationship with my spouse.

Do I want it badly enough to really change the way I behave? Do I want it badly enough to get out of my comfort zone and do something kind of scary? Am I willing to *work* for it? Do I want it enough to persevere and re-strategize if initially I do not succeed?

If you cannot honestly answer “yes” to those questions, you would probably be better served by choosing another goal that is closer to your heart. If we keep our same old patterns, we will probably get our same old results.

Build on Prior Successes

Often the goals we set for ourselves involve more castigation than inspiration. We resolve to increase our business development efforts because we are disappointed in our income for the past year. We set a goal of losing weight because we don’t like what we see in the mirror. If we start out feeling like failures, what impact does that have on our likelihood of success?

This time, begin by reviewing your successes and achievements

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from the past year. List as many as you can think of, large and small. Don't skimp on yourself in this area. Venerate your accomplishment of finally bringing in that big new client, and also acknowledge the chance meeting that may some day develop into new business. Think of successes in every area of your life, including ones that are unrelated to your current goals. Give yourself full credit for every accomplishment, and notice what helped you get there.

Look for patterns common to your successes. Do you tend to persevere more when you collaborate with someone? Or do you accomplish more alone? What made your efforts fun? What kept you going when you got discouraged? Which of your strengths did you rely on? How did you manage to be in the right place at the right time?

After that assessment, you can look at your failures and disappointments. Don't dwell on them, but do try to identify what caused the breakdowns. In the future can you delegate or outsource that portion of the project? Can you elicit the support of a partner or coach? Do you need more education on the subject? What could turn drudgery into fun? What lessons can your failures or shortcomings teach you?

The Paradox of Goals

For many of us, planning and goal setting involve a paradox. On the one hand, we are much more likely to achieve goals that we write down and develop a plan for accomplishing. On the other hand, action plans can make us feel regimented and controlled, sapping our enjoyment of the process of achievement.

If feeling constrained or losing motivation is a factor in your past failure, here are some suggestions for circumventing the problem. Get a clear image of the benefits of attaining the goal. Imagine yourself achieving the goal, notice what is happening around you as you achieve it, how you feel, what the environment looks like, what people say to you, etc. Olympic athletes use such visualization both to motivate themselves and to enhance their performance by mentally rehearsing. (Studies have shown that mental rehearsal of an action is almost as valuable to performance enhancement as physical rehearsal.) Make this visualization compelling to you, and return to it often. Use it to rekindle your flagging enthusiasm, and to guide you when course corrections are needed.

In addition to demotivating us, a rigid plan can restrain our ability to recognize and capitalize on opportunities of the moment. So leave room in your action plan for adjustment and flexibility, so that an unexpected competing priority or a minor setback doesn't have to completely derail you. When you can't get to the gym because you have kid duty, go rollerblading around the neighborhood with them or initiate a game of tag to get your cardio workout. Have you ever tried lifting kids instead of free weights? Engage them in the creative problem solving process and you may wind up also serving your goals of having more fun and improving family relationships.

Create SMART Goals

The Practice Manager is a newsletter published by the Law Office Management Program of the State Bar of Texas. Please direct any questions or comments to Orlando Lopez at 800-204-2222, ext. 1302 or at olopez@texasbar.com

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Another common problem with goal setting is that we become discouraged when we can't see our progress. Sometimes that is a matter of how we defined the goal. To avoid setting ourselves up for failure, we can set "SMART" goals. SMART is an acronym for 5 important characteristics of the goal we write down. The goal should be:

Specific - describe it in detail. Don't just use words like "good, nice, better, more, happier," but include a description of what that would look like.

Measurable - identify a way to measure your progress. Find a manifestation of that state that can be counted or otherwise quantified.

Actionable - make sure you can actually do something to influence the occurrence of the desired outcome. A goal of having 15 more sunny days in your hometown is probably not actionable.

Realistic - choose something that is a stretch, but still in the realm of reality for you. Increasing your net income by \$10 million this month might be possible (by robbing a bank, winning the lottery, etc.), but it's not very realistic.

Time-based - set a time by which you intend to accomplish your goal which is distant enough to be realistic, but close enough to get you into action.

Here is an example of changing a nebulous goal into a SMART goal.

Original goal: have more influence on the management

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policies of my firm.

SMART goal: get 2 of my suggestions for implementing better performance evaluations at the firm initiated by August 2005.

Sometimes in the process of trying to state a SMART goal, we begin to develop an action plan for achieving the goal. For example, the goal of having more influence in the firm might have been broken down to 3 SMART goals for 2005, as follows:

1. Get appointed to the Associate Development Committee by March 1, 2005
2. Identify and design a program with committee approval by June 1, 2005 that will improve associate retention.
3. Get management committee approval of the plan by August 1, 2005.

Post your 2005 SMART goals somewhere that you will see often. It's a good idea to review them each morning to help stay on track and note your progress. Put the due dates and other benchmark dates in your calendar.

Identify Resources

Once we clarify our goals, we don't have to be Lone Rangers in accomplishing them. Stop to think about what resources are available to help. Create a list of colleagues, business associates, friends and family members who may have knowledge, introductions, labor, funds or other support to donate, trade or sell to you. Also identify businesses, professional service providers, trade associations, internet sites, government organizations, non-profit organizations, municipal services, universities and libraries that may be helpful to you in accomplishing your goal. Simply creating this list may open up possibilities you hadn't considered before.

Create an Action Plan

Once you have your goal identified as a SMART goal and have potential resources in mind, you can begin to create an action plan to achieve it. Sometimes it helps to work backward from the desired outcome, identifying the projects and stages that will need to be accomplished to achieve your goal. Once you have the major projects identified, then you can begin to list the individual action steps involved in each project necessary to the goal. Remember to include some of your success strategies that you identified previously.

For example, assume the goal is to lose 10 lbs by March 1, 2005. That would involve eating in a more healthy way and getting more exercise. The projects may be as follows:

1. Find a gym or other location for a type of exercise that would be enjoyable to me and within my budget
2. Research sustainable eating plans that accommodate my tastes and schedule
3. Identify an exercise partner or other source of ongoing support and accountability
4. Identify strategies to make it fun
5. Design my eating plan

6. Design my exercise plan
7. Set benchmark evaluation dates for assessing progress and tweaking the plan as needed
8. Acquire any equipment or supplies needed

My action steps under project #2 above might be:

1. Research Adkins, Zone, South Beach and Weight Watcher diets on the internet by January 2, 2005.
2. Contact nutrition coach Louisa Nedkov by January 3, 2005 about nutrition and weight loss suggestions because her advice has worked in the past
3. Buy a book of easy and healthy weight loss recipes or find some recipes on a website by January 4, 2005.
4. Contact my health conscious friends for recommendations on good restaurant choices by January 5, 2005.

See how much more likely I am to succeed with a well defined goal and a strategic plan, than with a nebulous goal of "lose some weight?"

Plan the Reward!

Finally, although sometimes achieving our goal is a reward in itself, I believe we need to consciously acknowledge and celebrate our accomplishments. Is it any wonder that we lose motivation if the only acknowledgment of our efforts is the assignment of another task or goal? Most of the time we won't have others awarding us Pulitzer Prizes or throwing ticker-tape parades for us, so we need to design a reward that is meaningful to us and appropriate to the accomplishment. For example, when I lose that 10 lbs., I'll buy myself a new outfit. When I get that management committee approval of the associate retention program, I'll invite a couple of my close friends and supporters out to dinner to toast the success. When I achieve my goal through long hours of hard work, I'll give myself permission to stay in bed and read all day. The important thing is to celebrate in a way that is meaningful and fulfilling to you. Don't short-change yourself. Your subconscious is watching, and will erode your determination next time, if you do.

Now you have some ideas on how to do it differently this time. I would love to hear about your results. To help get you started in the process, you can download a goal setting questionnaire from my website at www.DebraBruce.com.

Debra Bruce (www.DebraBruce.com) practiced law for 18 years, before becoming a professionally trained Executive Coach for lawyers. She is a member of the Law Office Management Committee of the State Bar and Co-Leader of the Houston chapter of the International Coach Federation.

Upcoming Events

How to Organize and Manage Your Litigation Practice is scheduled live for January 15, 2005 in San Antonio. This seminar has been approved for 3.0 MCLE hours. For more information visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=4825>

Law Office Management Institute – Managing Your Personal Injury Practice is scheduled for video replay in San Antonio on January 19, 2005. This seminar has been approved for 5.75 MCLE hours, including .75 in ethics. For more information, visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMEventsMI.asp>

How to Organize and Manage Your Employment Law Practice is scheduled live for January 19, 2005 in San Antonio. This seminar has been approved for 3.0 MCLE hours. For more information visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=4935>

Law Office Management Institute – Managing Your Family Law Practice is scheduled for video replay in Houston on January 26, 2005 and Austin on January 28, 2005. This seminar has been approved for 4.75 MCLE hours, including .75 in ethics. For more information, visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMEventsMI.asp>

Law Office Management Institute – Managing Your Criminal Law Practice is scheduled for video replay in San Antonio on February 16, 2005. This seminar has been approved for 5.75 MCLE hours, including .75 in ethics. For more information, visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMEventsMI.asp>

How to Organize and Manage Your Immigration Practice is scheduled live for February 23, 2005 in Houston. This seminar has been approved for 3.0 MCLE hours. To register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574

Law Office Management Institute – Managing Your Consumer Bankruptcy Practice is scheduled for video replay in Houston on February 23, 2005 and Austin on February 25, 2005. This seminar has been approved for 5.75 MCLE hours, including .75 in ethics. For more information, visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMEventsMI.asp>

How to Organize and Manage Your Intellectual Property Practice is scheduled live for March 9, 2005 in Austin. This seminar has been approved for 3.0 MCLE hours. To register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574.

Law Office Management Institute – Managing Your Legal Department is scheduled for video replay in Austin on March 11 2005, March 23, 2005 in San Antonio and Houston on March 30, 2005. This seminar has been approved for 3.0 MCLE hours. For more information, visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMEventsMI.asp>

Law Office Management Special Offers

Books of the Month

How to Build and Manage an Employment Law Practice

Retail - \$54.95

Sale Price - \$38.45

How to Build and Manage an Employment Law Practice provides you with practical, real-world advice from an employment law expert, covering situations ranging from the initial client consultation to the pros and cons of solo versus group practice. Plus, you'll get samples of the most common letters and agreements used in employment law as well as general practice, including demand letters, the EEOC charging document, and much more.

The Lawyer's Guide to Adobe Acrobat

Retail - \$59.95

Sale Price - \$41.95

Written by a practicing lawyer for lawyers, this manual will help you master Adobe Acrobat by providing you with concise information on how to get the most from all aspects of the program. You'll get hands-on examples of how the software provides unique solutions for law firms, along with useful tips and shortcuts.

**TO ORDER EITHER OF THESE PUBLICATIONS,
CALL 800-204-2222, EXT. 1300**

Law Office Management Tip

All management tips are provided by State Bar of Texas and ABA Practice Management Advisors. The tips are not meant as legal advice, nor binding on the State Bar of Texas or the ABA.

www.freecycle.org is a site that is great for getting rid of any kind of junk around your house or office. You simply post what you want to give away and people e-mail to try to win the contest. You can pick the first to respond, or you can pick the person you feel deserves it most. Then they come pick it up. The only hard rule is that it must be entirely FREE. They use Yahoo groups to facilitate the messaging with groups broken down by cities or towns. You use the links to join the group for your city.