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A NEWSLETTER PROVIDED BY THE LAW PRACTICE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OF THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS

THE TECHNOLOGY ROUNDUP

Gerry Morris, J.D.

An Inexpensive Solution for Improving Cell Phone Reception Inside

A lot of us have become dependent on our smartphones and cell phones for calls, emails and other functions. Most of us take for granted we'll have an adequate signal allowing us to use the functions on Treos, Blackberrys, iPhones, etc., requiring network access. But, there are exceptions to signal availability even in areas serviced by your carrier.



There are times when the signal may be degraded by the building that you are in to the point where it is unreliable, or terrain features such as hills may block the signal. My wife and I recently moved to a home in a hilly area of Travis County. Our house sits on the side of a hill and is of stucco construction. The net effect of the location and construction was that

we received only a very weak Sprint signal inside our home. The signal was so weak that almost all calls of any length were dropped. It was also difficult to download email or use the other web enabled functions on our Treos. Like many of you, we use our cell phones as our primary means of placing and receiving calls even at home, so this was a problem.

We had adequate signal strength outside and at the height of our rooftop, so I looked at ways to bring that signal into our home. There turned out to be a simple, inexpensive solution. Several companies make devices most often referred to as signal extenders or signal

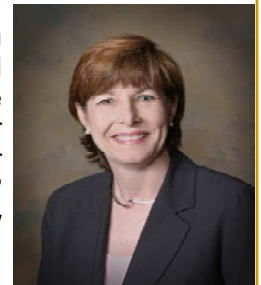
See *Technology Roundup* on page 3

THE COACH'S CORNER

Debra Bruce, J.D.

Resolve to Get Organized

Did you set a New Year's resolution to get organized? Getting organized and losing weight seem to be the most common resolutions I hear people make, whether lawyers or not. What does "getting organized" look like for the law office? And how do you do it?



Paper comprises the biggest organizing challenge in most law offices. Lawyers still wade through paper every day, and some drown in it. This article has a few tips that may help you actually move into action on this year's resolution to get organized. You don't have to turn your office upside down. Just take a few baby steps.

1. **One project at a time.** As much as possible, keep only the one file you are currently using on your desktop. When folders and papers pile up on your desk, you waste time digging through them to find the document you need. Additionally, stray papers distract you. A page floats into your field of vision, and suddenly you switch gears to deal with it. Maybe you were keeping that document in sight to remind you to handle it, but that's like having a snooze alarm ring every five minutes for something you want to do three hours later.

2. **Reasons for desk junk.** Junk piling up on your desk indicates that (i) you have a decision to make that you're postponing, (ii) you don't have an obvious place to store the item, or (iii) you are afraid you'll forget to do something if the item is out of sight. Once something else gets piled on top, it's out of sight anyway. Instead of piling it, file it, and put a reminder on your to-do list. Create a proper place for your things. The most frequently used items should be most conveniently at hand. That commemorative gavel you received for speaking can go on a shelf, or in your "commemorative trinkets" box. The paper that represents an unmade decision may belong in the hanging folder rack described in #4 below.

See *Coach's Corner* on page 2

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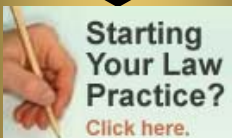
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your law practice



Coach's Corner continued from page 1

3. A compromise for the "piler." If you are an incorrigible "piler" or just *have to have* several files visible on your desktop, use a graduated file holder that will allow you to see the label of six to eight folders standing up. Rotate folders out of the graduated file holder to the file cabinet as soon as possible.

4. Organizing pending matters. As an alternative to the graduated file holder, you can use a hanging folder rack with labels on the hanging folders like "read," "take home," "urgent," "pending," "bills," "decide," or whatever categories apply to those things you tend to keep on top of your desk. (Of course, the same hanging folders *could* go in a desk drawer.) An "upcoming events" category can hold the brochures for those seminars that you haven't decided whether to register for, invitations to judicial candidate receptions, directions to holiday parties, etc. Use a "discuss" folder to hold the associate's draft that you revised and sent to the client, but which you want for feedback to the associate. The folder might also hold a staff person's vacation request that you want to discuss with a partner before approving.

5. In and out trays. Put 2 stacking trays on the corner of your desk. Tray 1 is the inbox where your assistant puts incoming mail, documents that need your signature, phone messages, etc. You should empty that box several times per day. Tray 2 is the outbox. Your assistant empties that box every time he comes into your office. It will contain folders and papers ready to be filed, documents you have signed or marked with instructions or revisions, and notes to your assistant about non-urgent tasks to be done, like "make a copy of this article and send it to Joe."

6. The "read" box. You may want a third tray to hold papers you intend to read later, but which are not urgent. Don't let those items pile up in your inbox, because they will camouflage the important and urgent arriving items. Stuff a few "read" items in your briefcase as you leave the office. They are great to pull out while waiting for a hearing, sitting in a waiting room, or even standing in line. The time goes by faster, and you get something done.

7. Hot projects file cabinet. Keep a file cabinet in your office for currently active

projects and frequently used items. (Many lawyers may be surprised to learn that the floor is not a file cabinet.) During trial preparation or in the middle of a big deal, attorneys need frequent access to the same large files. A lateral desk-height file cabinet can be reached without getting up, by just rolling your chair a few inches. You are much more likely to put away frequently used items if it doesn't require much physical exertion.

8. Schedule a de-clutter day. Sometimes, despite your best intentions, your office just gets out of control. Enlist your assistant for help and use the first day back after you close a big deal or complete a trial as an office organizing day. Your brain is probably too fried to accomplish much real legal work then anyway. Alternatively, just block off a day on your calendar for you and your assistant to spend organizing. You will be surprised at the energy boost you feel when you walk into a clean office the next day. Those stacks of paper and other clutter had invisible strings tied to you that siphoned off your energy and concentration.

9. Delegate more organizing. If you have outdated materials piled up in your office, that's a sign that you don't do a good job of delegating. Let your assistant calendar events and sort through papers periodically to trash items representing expired opportunities. Let him gather up and file documents you don't currently need. They won't be lost or destroyed, they'll just be easier to find.

10. Dedicate 15 minutes per day to planning. Just 10 to 15 minutes of planning and organizing at the end of the day can keep your office manageable. You'll know where things are, and be better prepared to hit the ground running the next day, with a clearer idea of your priorities.

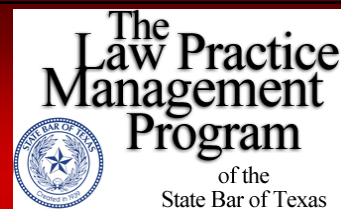
11. Location of file cabinets. Ideally, the cabinet containing your current files will be located not far from your assistant's desk, just outside your office. That will make it easy for you to find the file you need and for your assistant to re-file it every day, if necessary. It's better for him to repeatedly replace that file than to have it get buried in your office. Closed files or infrequently used files can be stored down the hall or on those hard to reach high shelves.

12. Brad down papers. Hole punch and brad down documents in the folder in chronological order, with the most recent

See *Coach's Corner* on page 4



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Technology Roundup continued from page 1

repeaters. They all work basically the same. An antenna is placed in an area where there is an adequate signal, usually outdoors or in an attic. The antenna is connected, usually by coaxial cable, to a device located inside a structure that receives the signal and rebroadcasts it into the area where the signal is weak or non-existent.

I looked at a few of these devices and decided to purchase the zBoost YX500 PCS manufactured by Wi-Ex. You can read more about their products at www.wi-ex.com. The zBoost is available in three models. There is a model that works with PCS (1900 MHz) phones except Nextel. Basically, it works with CDMA, GSM and TDMA networks operating at that frequency. That is the model I purchased for my Sprint phones. This model also works with T-Mobile, Metro PCS, Cricket and Suncom. There is a model that works only with CEL phones in the 800MHz range used by Cingular, Verizon and Altel. It supports the associated networks, CDMA, GSM, TDMA AMPS, GPRS, EDGE, 1xRTT and EVDO. This model is designated YX500-CEL. There is also a model that works with both in case you want to provide coverage for phones on different frequencies. That model is designated YX510-PCS-CEL.

If all this alphabet soup of networks is confusing, there are a couple of ways to determine which model is the correct one for your phone to save you from having to spend about \$100 dollars more for the model that covers both band ranges. Most phones have an info screen that tells you on which frequency the phone operates. For instance, on my Treo 755p pressing the dropdown menu button from the phone screen and selecting "Options" gets you to a menu selection called "phone info." There, a screen lists the operating frequency of the phone as 1900 MHz. You can also call your carrier if you have the time and patience and find out the operating specs of your phone or visit their web site. Fry's Electronics, where I bought my zBoost, had one of the dual band units set up so that I could place a call on my cell phone near it and the indicator lights on the unit would reveal which model would work with my phone.

As I said, the single band units are less expensive. I paid about \$210 for my YX500-PCS. The reason I chose this brand was primarily because of its review on CNet.com. I've come to rely on CNet over the years to help me pick a product out of the competitors. CNet gave zBoost an "excellent" rating scoring it as 8.6 out of a possible 10. Also, the product appeared to be easy to set up. It proved to be so.

The product comes with a small antenna and mounting bracket that can be placed inside an attic or outside in an area where there is sufficient signal. The antenna connects to the indoor repeating unit via high quality coaxial cable of the type used in most homes now for cable or satellite TV. It comes with a 35' cable. Of course, it is often a challenge to figure out how to get the cable from the outside to the inside of the structure with the least amount of damage to the wall. Wi-Ex sells an accessory that is basically a piece of thin, flat coaxial cable with connections on either end. This piece can be placed at the bottom of a window to allow the cable to enter through the closed window. Fortunately, our house was constructed with wiring for both satellite and cable TV. I hooked the antenna to the unused satellite TV input on the outside of the house and hooked the repeater to the satellite TV connection inside.

Once the cable has been run and connected to the unit on the inside, all you have to do is plug in the AC power cord for the repeater unit. The extended signal radiates out from the unit so I placed it more or less in a central location in the living area of our home.

The product works as advertised. The Sprint signal in our home is much improved. I haven't had a single dropped call when I'm in range of the repeater unit. If I am out of range I can walk into the area that is covered without interrupting my call. The manufacturer says that the coverage can be up to 2500 sq. ft. That can only be achieved under ideal conditions and with outdoor antenna upgrade. The range also depends on the strength of the signal at the location of the antenna. In my case, the signal, even outside, is average, so my unit out of the box probably covers about half that area. I intend to upgrade the antenna and possibly add another unit in a different area of the house.

The bottom line is the zBoost is a quick fix for low signal strength inside of a building where there is adequate signal outside or in the attic area. Make sure you get the right model for your phone. The only installation challenge is bringing the cable inside to the repeater unit. Other than that it's just a matter of connecting the cable and plugging it in.

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date on top. This may seem obvious, but I have been surprised to learn how many lawyers have loose papers tossed into files. That increases the risk that something will get lost because it falls out of the folder, or someone pulls it out and fails to replace it, or accidentally stuffs it back into the wrong folder. It also requires more time to sort through those documents to identify the most recent one. If the file has more than 10 documents in it, separate them into appropriate folders labeled "pleadings," "correspondence," "drafts," "executed documents," etc.

13. Create checklists. Checklists save time and reduce errors, while making delegation easier. For any task or project that you do repeatedly, create a checklist. You may have one for new client interviews, forming a new business entity, opening a new case, filing a lawsuit, setting up an estate plan, etc. A thorough checklist can guide a new associate or legal assistant to take the necessary steps without requiring much of your time. It will help you avoid forgetting some small, but essential aspect of the process. Put the checked-off list in the file. When you can't remember whether you completed that one detail, you can just review the checklist to rest easy. If you travel frequently, a briefcase packing list can save time and frustration at the airport, as well as allow your assistant to take care of more details for you. A binder or computer file of checklists comes in handy and keeps them accessible.

14. Electronic organization. Today email clutter causes some of the most common disorganization woes. That subject merits its own forum. For tips on managing your email, read my article called "[10 Tips for Surviving the Email Avalanche](#)." To cut down on paper altogether, establish a "paperless" or "less-paper" office. You can find great tips in various articles by Gerry Morris about the paperless office in [The Practice Manager](#). The most recent one was published [November 27, 2007](#).

Don't get discouraged by this long list. You probably don't need *all* these tips. If you only implement one suggestion on this list, but do it consistently, you'll notice a difference.

Debra Bruce (www.lawyer-coach.com) practice law for 18 years, before becoming a professionally trained Executive Coach for lawyers. She is Vice Chair of the Law Practice Management Committee of the State Bar of Texas, and board member and past leader of Houston Coaches Network, the Houston Chapter of the International Coach Federation. She welcomes your questions and comments at debra@lawyer-coach.com.

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Upcoming Events

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Law Practice Management Webcast

The Dissolution of a Law Practice is scheduled for January 23, 2008 from 12:30 to 1:30 pm. More details to come, visit: <http://www.TexasBarLPM.com/> and click on "Webcasts".

Law Practice Management Tip

Management Tips are provided by the 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.

Did you know that how you introduce yourself can make a big difference in your business development efforts? Learn how to meet and greet people and not turn them away by how you introduce yourself. If you immediately say "I'm a labor lawyer," few people will ever think to themselves that they will need your services. At that point you may have lost the opportunity to market yourself for any other purpose. Create a five second introduction to repeat when meeting new people (i.e. potential clients). It should be natural and informative, such as "I am a problem solver for small businesses" or "I help families plan for their financial future."