This January marked the beginning of my seventh year in solo practice (and fortunately the elapsing of the statute of limitations for breach of contract on many of the mistakes I made those dicey days of 2008). Most marriage counselors talk about the seven year itch as a time when marriages sometimes hit rough patches. So am I in for a rough patch this year? Who knows, but more importantly, what could I have done differently in the last seven years? (other than inventing Twitter or investing in Minecraft).

With that in mind, in an attempt to advise anyone attempting to take the plunge and go out into solo practice (does anyone call it “investing in M incraft”). This January marked the beginning of my seventh year in solo practice. So, back to 2014, it is pretty clear that some mistakes are unavoidable, some are truly great (if clichéd) learning experiences. Being in solo practice means, at least for me, busting out of your comfort zone and pushing yourself to places you would not necessarily go. At the same time, be more than willing and available when others call for your opinion. Numerous times I have had calls from other attorneys about various types of bankruptcy questions that lead to actual paying clients when the other attorney realizes how valuable you could be. Or when the other attorney gets a call in your field, and remembers you took the time two months ago to talk to him.

So, back to 2014, it is pretty clear that some mistakes are unavoidable, some are truly great (if clichéd) learning experiences. Being in solo practice means, at least for me, busting out of your comfort zone and pushing yourself to places you would not necessarily go. At the same time, after being in solo practice, I am not sure I would ever be able to work for someone else ever again. Unless John Calipari needs a new bench coach….where is that time machine anyway?

1) **Keeping the overhead low.** Of course as a bankruptcy lawyer, this is a rule I probably see in real life more so than other attorneys. But it is a valuable lesson. Grow slowly. You are not going to walk into a million dollar fee your first month. It takes time to make money in any business and practicing law is no exception. You are going to have to buy malpractice insurance, software, stationary etc. But be judicious about it. You do not have to subscribe to the giant legal research company your old firm uses. (Your TBA membership can hook you up to one for a fraction of the cost.) You do not need an office with a balcony (this is a temptation I still fight in my current location). Please, please, please do not go into debt starting a solo practice. Take your time. The funds will come but it does take time.

2) **Writing thank you notes for referrals.** Remember the personal touch. It really does go a long way. Send colleagues notes to tell them they are appreciated and be sure you follow up on every lead a colleague sends you.

3) **Finding a mentor.** I was ... and seven years later ... still am ... very blessed to have several colleagues I can still call and bounce ideas off. That is the hardest part about being on your own. Only one set of eyes to look at an issue. At the same time, be more than willing and available when others call for your opinion. Numerous times I have had calls from other attorneys about various types of bankruptcy questions that lead to actual paying clients when the other attorney realizes how valuable you could be. Or when the other attorney gets a call in your field, and remembers you took the time two months ago to talk to him.

4) **Living in fear of making mistakes and not owning them when you do.** You are human, you are going to make mistakes. I have learned the hard way it is best to confess fully to your client or trustee or other counsel rather than to hope the mistakes blow over or you can somehow duck it. But you cannot let fear paralyze you. Remember, making a mistake in judgment in practice is not necessarily malpractice. And you will make mistakes and without the safety net of a boss or a firm behind it can be terrifying. But own them, learn from them but do not let it rule you.

Finally, a few things I can tell you I did correctly.

1) **Staying in your office too much.** It’s a new office; it’s fun to be on your own. You can organize on your own desk, no boss breathing down your neck (this was, by the way, the first year the entire NCAA tourney was online in real time), it’s so peaceful and ... quiet. Too quiet. **GET OUT OF YOUR OFFICE**. Go meet with colleagues, take people to lunch, get a giant stack of business cards, and go out. Go to bar meetings or meetings at a bar, go to the courthouse, go to where lawyers are. You have got to get the word out face to face. Mailings and announcements are fine, but nothing beats talking to a colleague face to face. They will remember that a lot more. Referrals from other lawyers have long been the life blood of my practice.

2) **Using your initial downtime to get organized.** Yes, before the phone starts ringing (and it will), be sure all of your systems are in place. Have forms ready, engagement letters ready, billing software in place so that when you need it, it is accessible. It is critical to client development to be able to perform to clients as promised. Waiting a week to issue an engagement letter is probably not a good start.

3) **Going cheap on your Internet presence.** Even in 2008, this was a bad idea. Now it would almost be fatal. The phone book is right next to the blacklist in the museum of discarded relics of American economic history. Unless you are the rare solo lawyer who has a built in client base with no need to expand, then you have got to be able to be discovered by potential clients. Invest in some website marketing experts. (But invest wisely, once these people get wind that you are out there and looking for clients, you will be inundated with solicitors). Be sure you learn the ethics rules and pitfalls of web pages and social media. Beware especially the pay-per-click website people. But embrace the Internet.

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