ORGANIZE FOR SUCCESS:

Best practices for maximizing productivity in shared law office space

by Steve Perih and Stephen Furnari

IT FEELS JUST LIKE A LAW FIRM

...BUT HAPPIER.

Law Firm Suites' shared law office space

…helps attorneys solve the challenges of small firm practice.

CLIENT REFERRALS

Receive client referrals for no other reason than showing up to work and being nice.

OFFICE RENTALS

Office options ideal for solos, small firm attorneys and out-of-town firms.

COMMUNITY

Lawyers are most successful when they work collaboratively with other successful attorneys.

VIRTUAL OFFICES

Premium commercial office services offered on a low-cost, a la carte basis.

BUILT-IN NETWORKING

Keep your network active even when you get too busy to leave the office.

CONFERENCE ROOMS

Conference rooms rentals in a facility that feels like a working law office, not a sterile hotel business center.

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A note about your Ethical Responsibilities

This eBook provides advice on the best practices for giving and receiving referrals. It is for information purposes only and does not constitute legal counsel, guidance or an opinion about how to practice law within the bounds of the ethical rules governing your jurisdiction. Compliance therewith is solely your responsibility and adherence to those rules should take precedence over the points discussed in this eBook.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS.

Stephen Furnari left the safety of a law firm job and began practicing as a solo attorney in 2002. He is now a partner in the law firm Furnari Scher LLP. In 2006, Furnari founded **Law Firm Suites** to help other solo attorneys and small law firms retain a competitive edge in today's increasingly crowded legal market. **Law Firm Suites** is now the leading provider of professional office solutions for solo attorneys and small law firms. At **Law Firm Suites**, attorneys get headache free, turn-key office space and virtual offices, membership in a community of lawyers who are eager to help them succeed, and referrals to increase the bottom line. **Law Firm Suites** estimates that its attorney in each business center exchange over $2.5 million in legal business per year.

Stephen Perih graduated Vassar College (no, it is not an all girl's school) in 2005 before getting his JD from New York Law School. Stephen joined **Law Firm Suites** in 2012 as the Sales & Operations Manager. Since then, he has organized and emboldened **Law Firm Suites**' community and accelerated the unique referral exchange among a rapidly growing roster of attorneys. Perih loves Bjork, Howard Stern, post-modern French philosophy and chicken soup, while maintaining an irrational fear of jelly fish.

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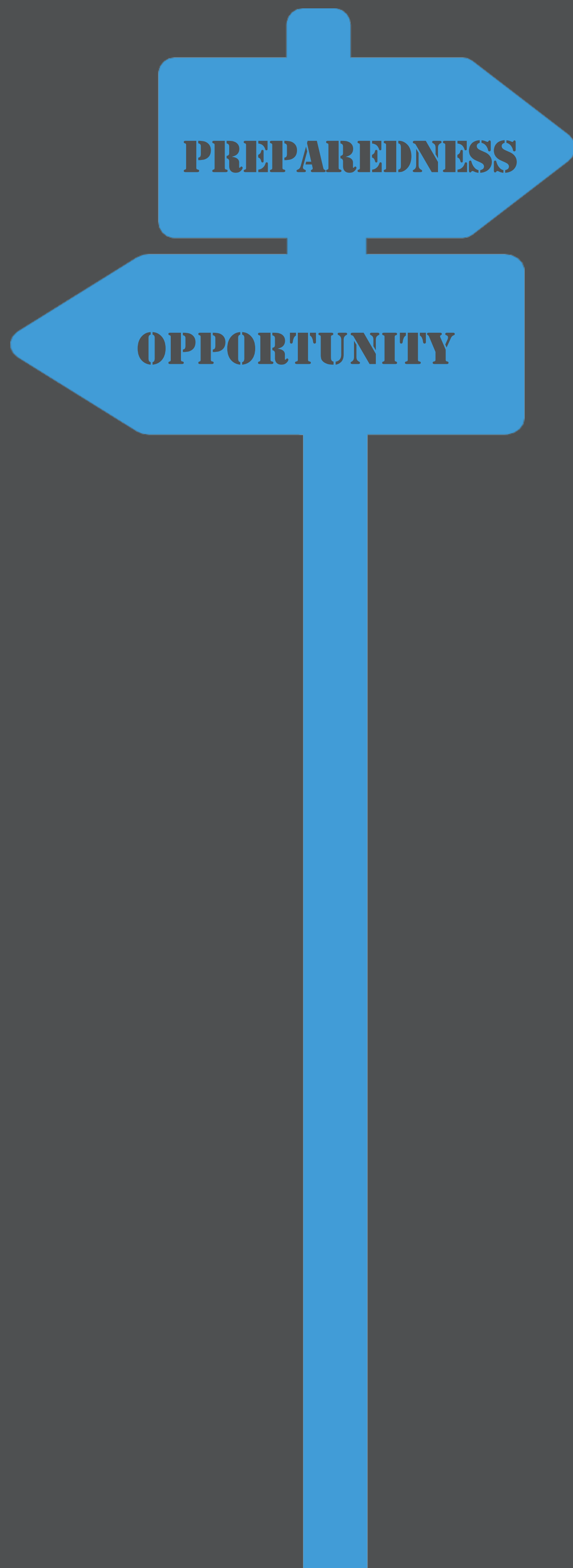
INTRODUCTION.

You're standing at the corner of preparedness and opportunity.

In any shared law office space there's no shortage of opportunity. Without looking hard, you'll find client referrals, lucrative co-counsel arrangements and shared strategies that will save you thousands of dollars in wasted time.

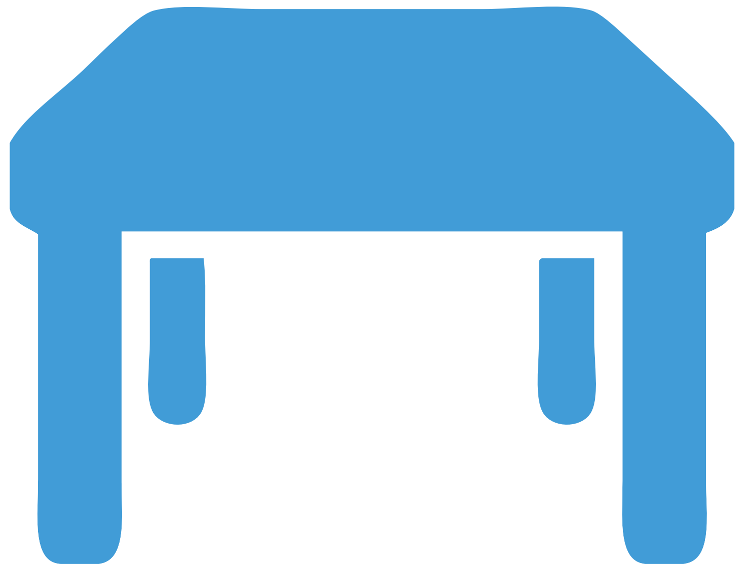
You've heard the expression "success is where preparedness and opportunity meet." Are you best organized to take advantage of these opportunities when they come up?

Take a minute and put yourself in a new client's shoes. If you walked into a lawyer's office and saw a disorganized mess of papers with hundreds of Post-It notes haphazardly stuck to the wall, would you question whether the attorney was competent to handle your case? Would you refer your own clients to that attorney?



If your clients saw your own office, would they be impressed or appalled?

Being organized inspires confidence in clients and the people who can refer you to them. It visually communicates to others that you are someone who knows what you are doing.



Being organized helps you perform better for your own clients and clients that other attorneys have referred to your firm. Offering competent and diligent counsel to a referred client not only makes you look good, but makes the referring attorney look good. The end result is a professional reputation for both parties and increased amounts of referral opportunities.

The difference between PHYSICAL organization and SOCIAL organization.

When we think about "being organized", what comes to mind first is "physical" organization. You know? A place for everything and everything in its place. It's what enables you to find that important letter from chambers when your client calls unexpectedly to discuss it.

The other type of organization is the kind that makes you prepared to take advantage of business opportunities when they come up. We refer to this as "social" organization. For example, staying top of mind with your neighbors so when an opportunity comes up that's a good fit for you, they remember you first.

Physical and social organization are integral aspects of a successful law practice. The lawyer who is physically organized may see incremental gains in productivity. But, the lawyer who can socially organize their practice, in tandem with achieving physical organization, will see an immediate growth in profits.

Get yourself ready to make easy money.

Most lawyers view office space as a necessary *COMMODITY*.

While this sentiment may be true, it is short-sighted. Your office space should be as monetarily productive as a junior associate. And just as your junior associate has a billable hours target, your office space should be held to the same standard. It should be something other than one of your firm's largest fixed expenses. In my law practice I have always made office space one of the most important parts of my marketing strategy.

Why?

- ✓ I always share space with other attorneys whose practice areas are complementary to mine.
- ✓ I am able to send many client referrals to these other attorneys.
- ✓ They, in turn, send client referrals to me.
- ✓ These referrals end up being a meaningful source of new business for my firm.

It's that simple.

> “I mean, you are going to be in your office anyway. Shouldn’t you be making the most of your monthly investment??”

Plus, it’s fun -- or at least less distasteful as compared to other kinds of marketing activities.

Cultivating referral relationships with attorneys in your office takes very little effort or time – a precious commodity in our business. Think about it. You will see your office mates every day. This is the easiest networking you will ever engage in.

Building referral relationships is an easy two-step process. First, find common ground. Then, build off that common ground with casual conversations. In a shared workspace, you can do this as you go about your regular workday.

This approach may seem purely opportunistic. BUT IT'S NOT.

In our profession, long days are part of the job. We spend many waking hours with our office colleagues. In some weeks, I see my office suitemates more than I see my wife and kids. Getting to know the people with whom I share office space makes my work life more enjoyable, so I make the extra effort to do so.

The referral exchange is merely a natural extension of our personal relationship – without which, the referrals wouldn't likely happen. As with any good referral relationship, a personal connection must come first.

How physical and social organization work hand-in-hand.

This being said, just because a marketing technique is easy doesn't mean you can do nothing and see results. Networking with your office colleagues may be as easy as a "nod of the head" in the hallway of your shared law office. But, a simple head nod will not produce referral income from your office mates. Like anything else, you have to put in the time. Sometimes this means making the time for being social.

This is where physical organization (the find-a-document-when-you-need-it kind) becomes important. Physical organization will make you more efficient, freeing up time for the kind of social interaction that results in securing business opportunities.

Being *socially organized* puts you in the best position to maximize those opportunities when they present themselves to you.

The most successful people achieve a balance between physical and social organization. This is especially true for lawyers. You must be physically organized to practice and effectively advocate for your clients. But, you must be socially organized to actually *get the client*.

So whether your office is in a big attorney-only executive suite like **Law Firm Suites**, or a six-attorney legal suite, my hope is that by following these simple tips about organization you will get the most value out of your shared law office space.

01
CHAPTER

PART 1
SET UP YOUR OFFICE SPACE TO EARN!

Your office should have two functions. Of course it should serve as an organized, utilitarian space to maximize your productive and billable hours. But, your office should also be a networking tool within your shared law office space.

Your neighbors will make assumptions about your professionalism based on how your office looks.

Imagine yourself attending a dinner party where you have not previously met the host.

You may know a little about his or her qualities and characteristics from a mutual friend, but that knowledge is really just a function of what other people have told you.

Before you even meet the host, you will likely make certain prejudgments about them based on the look and feel of their home. Is it interesting? Is it cold and sparse? Is it dirty? These snap judgments about the host's home become the host's personality traits until you learn more about them. It's unfortunate, but true.

In a shared law office space, your office is the equivalent of the house in the example above. It is the inevitable truth that people will judge you based on your office's invitingness and organization. Set up correctly, your office can increase opportunities to network with your neighbors and quickly form referral relationship bonds. If your office is a hot mess, you may be (inadvertently) turning people away

HOW TO CONFIGURE YOUR OFFICE TO MAXIMIZE SOCIAL INTERACTION.

1 You must be able to see the door when sitting at your desk.

Your desk will most likely be the largest piece of furniture in your office. As such, your desk will naturally be the focal point of the room, regardless of the size of the space. Positioning your desk is the most important aspect of your offices' social organization. Everything else will follow from there.

When figuring out your desk's location, take into account the easy access to networking, which is inherent to a shared law office space. Each colleague that walks past your doorway is a potential networking opportunity. So, position your desk so that you sit in the direction of the open door to your office. This way you will be able to nod, smile or exchange a few words as your future referral partners go about their word day.

Most importantly, avoid positioning the desk so that your back will be facing the door. It sends a message to other that you are "closed off"; even if your office door is open. Think about it, when is the last time you had a conversation with a colleague's back. Bad desk positioning is, literally, turning your back on money.

2 Plan for traffic flow and reducing clutter.

Once you have a location for your desk, sketch the placement of all your other furnishings or pieces you would like to purchase. Think about how people will be able to move around your office. Plan their route from the door to your desk. Your goal is to make the trip easy and inviting. If the walk from your door to your desk is cluttered and hazardous, you won't likely have visitors.

Don't forget to account for some storage space to hide personal items that can make your office look cluttered. Leave room in a cabinet or drawer for your coffee mugs, snacks, gym bag and shoes. Get a hook for the back of your door to keep an extra suit and hang your jacket. Now, with your measurements in hand, shop for the pieces you need.

3 Always find room for a Guest Chair.

It may sound simple, but you MUST include a guest chair in your office, no matter the size. The logic is deceptively brilliant. Having a guest chair encourages conversations. Conversations lead to referrals. Referrals are money in the bank.

Maximizing business opportunities in a shared law office space is directly correlated to maximizing conversations with colleagues.

Lawyers LOVE to talk shop. We want to brag about the winning legal theory we came up with. We want to bitch about the client that calls us 9 times a day. We want to tell you about how late we stayed at the office writing a brief, and how little sleep we get, and how great our kids are, and how much we love roast beef sandwiches. Well, you get the idea.

Conversations like this happen every day in a shared law office.

Now, here is where the guest chair plays an integral part. No lawyer is going to continue talking to you about their day for longer than 5 minutes without a place to sit. It's that simple.

We can hear some of you saying, *"Well that's good, who needs the interruption anyway."* If you think this way, then obviously you have all the business you can handle and don't need the hundreds of thousands of extra dollars you can make in a shared office space each year.

For the rest of you, you'd be surprised at the tangential thoughts that can jog a colleague's memory about a case that is a "bad fit" for them, that just so happens to be your bread and butter. A clutter free guest chair will encourage and foster a longer and deeper conversation than leaning in your doorway.

4 Use your furniture to tell your "professional story".

Being a lawyer is not just *what you do*; it is an inextricable part of *who you are*. Let's take this one step further.

Ask yourself: "What makes me different from my legal peers?"

Most of your colleagues will differentiate themselves by practice area. But the real answer to this question begets a deeper question: "How is your *style* of practice different than your peers and competition?"

For example, are you an aggressive killer in the court room who takes pleasure in crushing your adversaries at all costs? Or, are you a matrimonial mediator with an utterly calming demeanor that can bring even the most antagonistic of parties to a middle-ground? Maybe you are a young, hip, skinny-jean wearing entertainment lawyer who proudly displays vinyl records of the indie bands you represent. Or maybe you are a traditional corporate attorney who is a sucker for French cuffs and impeccably tailored suits.

You should choose furniture for your office which represents both your personal style and your practice style. Your furniture should function as a sort of visual resume for your clients and your colleagues. It should tell *your* story.

The Orange Sofa.

A Law Firm Suites client is fun-loving immigration attorney with a specific focus on the naturalization issues for artists. His office reflects his personality and practice area.

He has a bright (and I mean BRIGHT) orange leather sofa in his office, and modern Lucite guest chairs surround his asymmetrical desk.

These furnishings make sense for his practice area and clientele. His clients expect a hip, non-traditional lawyer who understands their unique needs and personalities. The hip furniture conveys this sentiment.

The furniture also attracts the attention of his colleagues, who always want to know where, exactly, he found an orange leather sofa. There has been a lot of business shared between this attorney and his suitemates because of, and while seated on, the orange sofa.

To maximize business opportunity, your office furnishing should be consistent with the image you are trying to project to prospective clients.

The traditional practitioner may go in the direction of a large mahogany desk accompanied with tufted maroon leather chair. This visually describes to clients that you understand their issues are serious, and you are the right lawyer to represent such serious matters. Or, the attorney who represents trendy, venture funded software companies might select a glass and chrome desk with a blue mesh swivel chair to compliment the décor. These office furnishings are reminiscent of the furnishings a software company usually has, and subtly communicates that you are an insider and you "get" them.

And, when you choose furniture and furnishings that accurately represent your practice style and philosophy, your office mates will respond to your visual resume.

In the case of the immigration attorney with the orange sofa, when his colleagues come across a potential referral that is artistic in nature, he is top-of-mind for the referral. This may seem simple to you, but: *furnish your office with items that give clients and colleagues insight into who you are as a person and a professional.*

Don't decorate like a legal imposter.

There is nothing worse than a legal imposter. If your furnishing are incongruent with the professional image you project in public (or on the Web), prospective clients (and your office mates) may be turned off when they finally meet you in your office.

They will either assume that you are too cheap to buy better quality furnishings, or worse, they might not trust you because, in reality, you do not appear to be the person who you've portrayed yourself to be online or outside the office.

To prospective clients and potential referral partners, you will have become the lawyer-equivalent of that guy who wears couture clothing and drives a European luxury vehicle, but still lives in the basement of his parent's home on the wrong side of town.

Helpful Tip:

Furniture is expensive, but expensive furniture is not necessary.

You do not have to spend a fortune on office furniture that highlights your professional philosophy. In fact, consider purchasing furnishings from stores like Ikea, Room & Board or even Office Depot. These stores have furnishings that are relatively inexpensive and will last a good five to ten years. A few years from now when it is time to upgrade your office and upgrade your furnishings, you won't feel guilty about getting rid of the old stuff.

5 Decorate your space with interesting items. They are conversation starters.

Just as your office space should be designed to serve as both a place to accomplish your work and a referral marketing tool, your office décor should pull double-duty as well. Decorating your office is extremely important. It is another aspect of your "visual resume."

When you are deciding on the feel of your office, pick pieces that you will enjoy seeing every day and that express something interesting about you to casual observers. It can be anything you love, like a piece of pottery from your Moroccan vacation, a Renoir print or your children's art. The décor is not as important as the story behind the object or the conversations it will inspire.

The Marathon Medal

Accessories reveal more of who you are as a person to your office mates. For example, a **Law Firm Suites** IP attorney is an avid runner. He has run the New York City Marathon three times and proudly displays his medals around his office. They are instant conversation starters and, as we have mentioned, collegial conversation with like-minded professionals is the first step in receiving the ultimate value from your shared law office space: referrals.

His neighbor, a trusts and estates attorney, runs from his uptown home to work (9 miles!) every day that the weather allows. He saw the medals and instantly a friendship was born. These two attorneys, in seemingly disparate practice areas, now network with and for each other. You would be surprised at the volume of referrals they have exchanged.

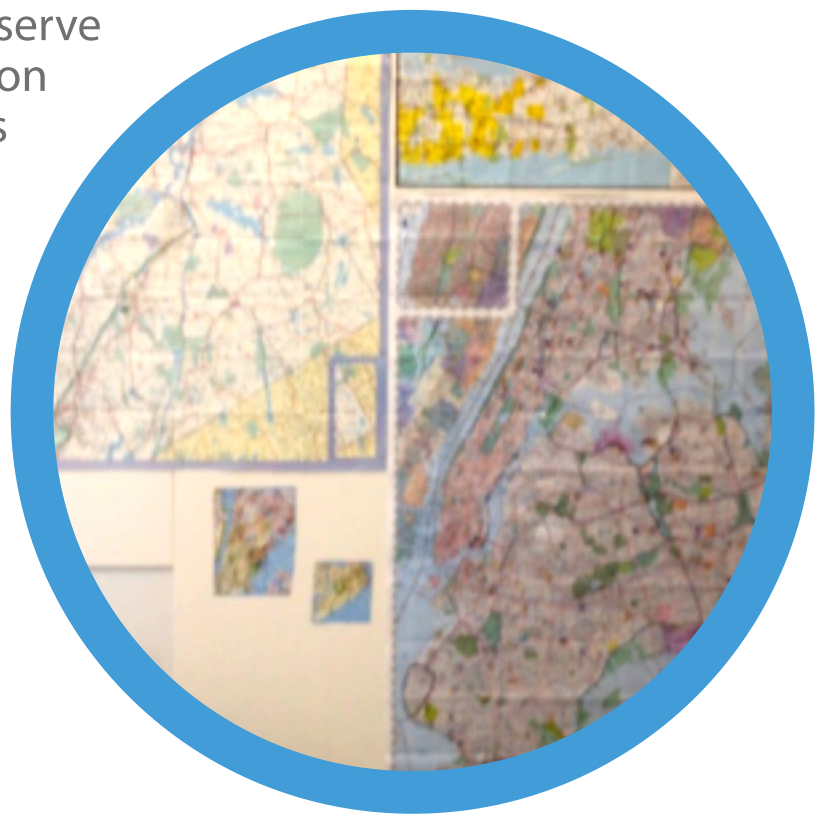
You do not have to be a runner to appreciate the marathon medals. The IP attorney regularly has people say to him "how they could never run a marathon", or extend a compliment about his dedication and perseverance. The marathon medals now symbolize the type of professional that this IP lawyer is: He is the lawyer who is willing to persevere for long-term benefits in the face of adversity. He is a lawyer who is tenacious and dedicated.

Find your own "marathon medals" and display them proudly. Here are four great examples of conversation-worthy décor items taken from our clients' offices:

Street Maps of New York Metro Area

One of our clients has several street maps of the New York City metropolitan area hung on his wall. Every borough and county is represented. On each of the maps are hundreds of colored push pins. Because the maps cover nearly half of a very large wall, everyone who comes into this lawyer's office asks about them. The conversation always becomes a bit of a "guess what the pins represent" game.

Of course, the attorney really likes maps, which is part of the reason he hung them on the wall. But he also happens to represent victims of nursing home abuse. The pins represent every nursing home in the NY metro area, color coded to reflect each nursing home's safety rating. The maps help him target his advertising, plus they serve as a great a great conversation starter for anyone who comes into his office.



Zen Art

One of our commercial litigators has decorated his office with Eastern artwork. He has been studying Eastern culture and philosophy since college, and these principals have become a professional ethos.

Unlike the typical litigator, who often has a reputation for being a pit bull, this attorney brings a "Zen" to his practice. For him, the art is a subtle reminder to think outside of the moment, and is a representation of the balanced approach he brings to every client matter.

One of the more interesting pieces in his office is a shadowbox containing an object that looks like a broken vase, or a piece of porcelain art, or an antique.

Frankly, we don't know what it is (and its' owner is in court today so we can't ask him).

But, I can tell you that four of us have stood around this piece talking about this lawyer, and the artwork, for a half hour. Each one of us will stopping by his office later to ask him about it, keeping him top of mind for all of us.

Antique Machines

A patent attorney in the office collects antiques, in particular, 19th Century household appliances. In his office he has a scale, a vaporizer, and a toaster.

These are sturdy objects that have craftsmanship and care. Items that were built to last forever, not like appliances today that are built to last for two years.

This attorney has been an intellectual property lawyer for over 40 years. Many of his clients have been with him since the beginning; through management changes and product shifts. These objects are symbolic of the craftsmanship and care he puts into his work. Just like the appliances from the 1880's, his legal work is meant to last.

The items themselves are unique looking – works of art in and of themselves. And in most cases, without asking (which people do frequently), you would never know what they are, and will be surprised when you find out. The point of the object is that it begs a question…one that he is happy to answer.

The Cool Looking Thing

One of our newer office mates is a family lawyer. She keeps a cool looking machine on her desk that looks like it came from the future. Most of it is indigo blue, so you can't miss it on her white desk.

Everyone that sees it stops in their tracks and asks about it. Some of her neighbors started having fun with it, taping thought bubbles onto it, or taking it to client meetings for good luck.

The attorney is young and takes a fresh approach to her practice. The trendy, high design, efficient machine is symbolic of who she is. It's also become the subject of a lot of conversations and has helped her become very well-known in the office in a short period of time.

Display your diplomas, but not for the reasons you think.

Diplomas also serve a dual purpose. They are the physical representation of your educational and professional accomplishments. For that reason alone you should proudly display them.

But, perhaps more importantly, your diplomas serve as an important networking tool, particularly in shared law office space. Years of higher education and multiple bar admissions is something every attorney has in common. It's an easy starting place for a conversation.

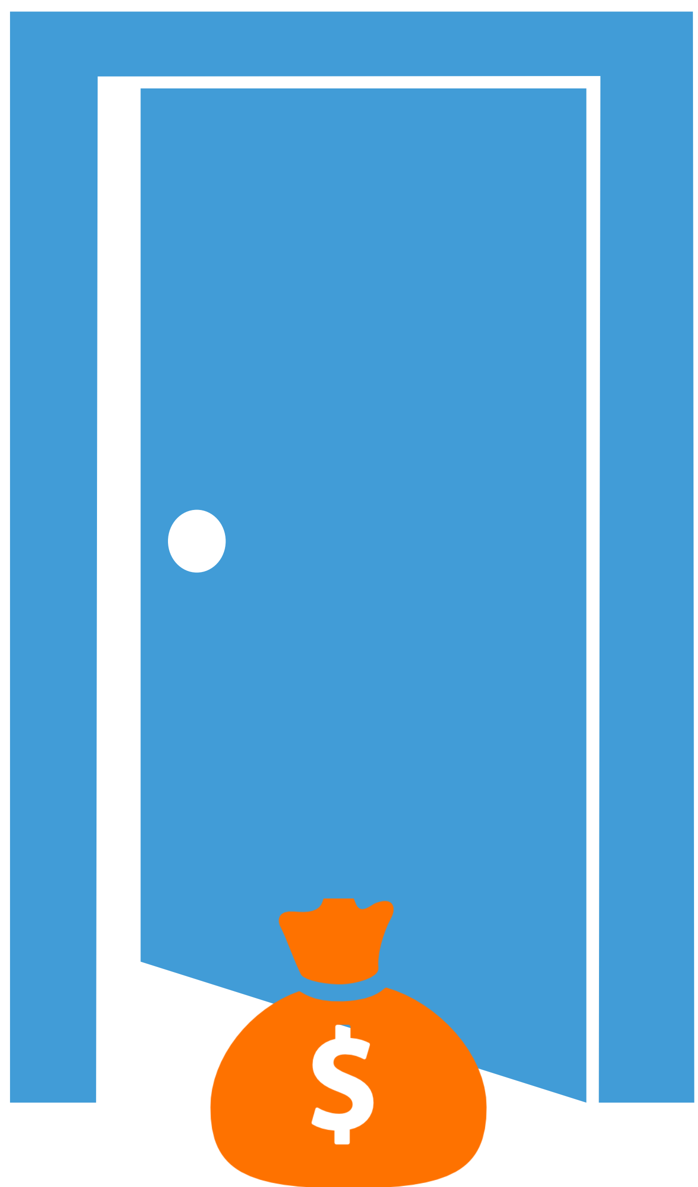
Maybe an office mate will walk into your office and realize you both went to the same law school or university. Maybe you are both admitted in an unusual jurisdiction. Your diplomas are an easy tool to help you build connections with your neighbors.

And the same goes for any certificates representing your other accomplishments. If you have participated in a community event, like the sponsorship of a little league team, hang that plaque proudly on your wall. It's these pieces that show clients and peers what kind of person you are. That's how connections are made, and building new connections is how you expand your practice.

Don’t close your door on potential money.

It may sound obvious, but you cannot be social with your door closed. No one can notice the interesting art on your walls if your door is closed. They can’t ask you for help on a legal theory. And they definitely cannot mention that their client needs a real estate attorney, which you just happen to be.

As lawyers, we must find a delicate balance between personal and professional. You have work to get done, and so do your officemates. But if you are not trying to finish an OSC at 2PM for a 4PM court deadline, then do your best to work with your door open. Doing so conveys to your neighbors that you are open to interactions. As in life, practicing law is all about cultivating relationships. Do your best to have your door open to new, potentially lucrative, relationships which may lead to referrals down the line.

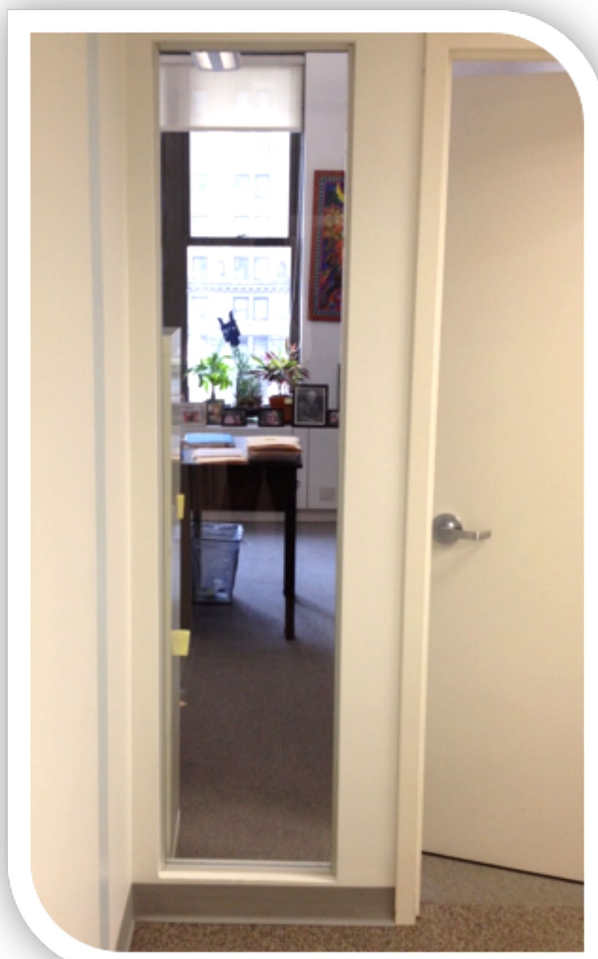


The Secret of the Sidelight Window

At some point during the day you'll take a phone call that will require you to shut your office door for privacy reasons. Chances are, after the call is over, you'll immediately move on to other things without opening the door. It will stay closed until your next caffeine break two hours later. This is just the nature of how we work.

At Law Firm Suites, most of our offices have a sidelight window directly next to the door. It's designed to give attorneys the privacy to work in quiet, but also maintain that "open door" vibe that helps foster community interaction. Just peak in the window to find out if the occupant is there, whether they are busy or available to talk.

The sidelight also serves a second purpose. Similar to the way you might go to your neighbor's open house to check out their stuff even though you're not in the market to buy a new home, it's designed to give the occupant the opportunity to show off their wares to curious passersby.



It's interesting to see who embraces the sidelight, and who attempts covers it up with furnishings and paper. In our view, the former tend to get the most value from the Community.

02
CHAPTER

PART 2
6 EASY STEPS TO SOCIAL ORGANIZATION.

For many of us, networking is a four letter word.

It's a necessary evil to keep the phone ringing with new clients. But, in a shared law office space, networking is as easy as showing up to work and being nice to your neighbors.

In its most basic form, networking is simply socializing with people who have similar business interests, and socializing comes naturally in a shared workspace. It's been our experience that the attorneys who see a tremendous amount of value in the form of easily found client referrals stay socially organized by following an easy six-step system.

STEP 1

GET YOURSELF INTRODUCED.

If you are new to a shared office space, make an effort to go around and say "Hi!" to all of your new officemates. You don't have to do the circuit all at one time. In fact, it's probably best that you don't. It might seem insincere and you won't be able to remember everyone's names or what you've learned about each person's practice and personal life.

Instead, allow it to happen naturally as you encounter your neighbors by the water cooler, the copy machine, or in the elevator. If you find that after a few days there are some people you've left out, now's the time to make an effort to seek them out so that they don't feel slighted.

If after a few days there are people you still haven't met, ask the person who is responsible for operating the space to make an introduction. Or you can ask a new friend to introduce you to someone they know.

The staff in your office can be an important ally.

The staff is frequently in a position to direct referrals to other lawyers. They can also let you know when someone new is coming into the office that could be a good referral source for you. Make sure all the office staff, including the receptionists, knows exactly what you do. They need to understand what your practice areas are and the types of cases or clients you prefer. The more specific you can be the better the results.

At **Law Firm Suites**, we introduce new clients to their immediate neighbors on the first day in the office. We also make sure the client knows which attorneys in the office are most likely to be their best sources for giving and receiving referrals. If they haven't met these other attorneys in a week or so, we make an introduction for them.

Everyone in the office has chosen to locate their practice in a shared office space to take advantage of all the benefits of being there, including a robust referral community. Everyone has busy moments but, for the most part expect that your neighbors will receptive to meeting you – the benefit by doing so as well and the savviest lawyers know this.

STEP 2

TALK TO PEOPLE, AND DO IT REGULARLY!

After initial introductions, make time to continue to get to know your officemates. Get in the habit of doing a "walk around" once a day to say hi and have quick conversations with your neighbors. Obviously, be respectful if they look busy. Most importantly, don't overstay your welcome.

As we like to say in our office, hit the eject button early and always leave them wanting more.

STEP 3

BE A GREAT CONVERSATIONALIST (SADLY, IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU).

If you engage in a conversation, keep it short, light and **all about them**. Ask about *their* weekend plans, *their* hobbies, how *their* kids are doing.

A conversation should not be a monologue. Nobody likes to talk to a self-centered blowhard. Ironically, most people's favorite topic of conversations is themselves. And lawyers take it to the next level: Most lawyers LOVE to hear the sound of their own voice.

In a shared office space, you must use this social phenomenon to your advantage. As a general rule, you should get in the habit of asking your colleagues questions that gets them talking about themselves. You'll come off as one of the most interesting conversationalist they know without having said much.

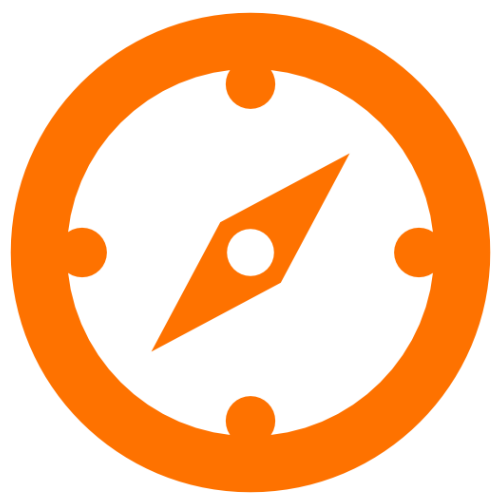
STEP 4

USE YOUR NEED FOR LEGAL ADVICE TO OPEN THE DOOR TO CONVERSATIONS.

One of the best perks of building your practice in a shared law office space is often the one most easily overlooked: The ability to work through a legal issue with a neighbor or colleague just down the hall. At Law Firm Suites, we have found that there is a direct correlation between the amount of time spent discussing practice issues with suite mates and the benefit an attorney derives from his office space.

You'd be surprised how much billable time can be saved by having a five minute conversation with a colleague who can point you in the exact direction you need to be, rather than spinning you wheels on the Westlaw portal.

If you find yourself needing to talk through a legal issue, ask your officemates. Lawyers love to feel knowledgeable and teaching a peer is one of the best ways to bond. Attorneys in shared office space expect the favor to be returned one day, so they are typically generous with their time. Just expect to return the favor to someone else when the need comes up down the road.



STEP 5

GIVE FIRST, GET A LOT LATER.

Once a week, go out to lunch with an officemate. Start by scheduling a lunch commitment in your calendar, as a reoccurring weekly event. Then, find officemates to fill this standing appointment. If you schedule it, then you will commit to it. Finding a lunch partner is never hard, especially in a shared law office suite.

The rules of dating also apply to business networking, so if you ask a colleague out to lunch, you should pay for it! Think of the spend as a marketing investment. A $60.00 lunch now may lead to $60,000.00 referral later.

Keep the lunch conversation light and relaxing. For the most part, try to stay away from conversation topics about work. The goal is for you and your officemate to get to know each other on a personal level. The stronger the personal connection you make, the more likely business referrals will flow.

GO OUT WITH A DIFFERENT PERSON EACH WEEK, OR USE LUNCH AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE TWO PEOPLE AND INVITE THEM BOTH.

As you begin to build relationships with your fellow lawyers, offer to cover their cases when they are out sick or on vacation. Chances are they will not take you up on your offer, but the gesture will be appreciated and remembered.

Every once in a while, treat the whole office (or a group of attorneys in a larger office) to pizza and beer after hours. Twice a year is more than enough. Like your weekly lunches, schedule it in advance in your calendar so you are committed to getting it done.

This will give you some time to roll up your sleeves and talk about anything other than shop. Your generosity will be appreciated, and you may forge unexpected friendships and professional relationships in the process.

Most importantly, when you become aware of new cases that you can't handle, make sure they get sent to you colleagues instead of rejecting the cases and sending them out into the ether. Referrals given will always be rewarded with referrals received, whether from the recipient directly or another unexpected source.

If you send referrals out to other clients it the office, (casually) make sure you let the person running the office know about it. They are in the middle of everything that goes on in the office and are frequently in a position to direct referrals to other lawyers. If they know you regularly add value to the community by bringing in referrals for work you can't handle, you will be at the top of the list for cases that are in your practice area.

Once you've proven yourself to be a friendly, capable and generous person, you will start to see referrals being sent your way.

STEP 6

CEMENT THE RELATIONSHIP BY FOLLOWING UP ABOUT SPECIFIC DETAILS SHARED.

The devil is in the details. One of the best ways to accelerate the relationship building process is to follow up with people who you've just met about specific things they've shared with you about themselves. Did their son compete in a big soccer tournament? Ask how the games went. Did their car go into the shop for repairs? Commiserate about the expense to maintain a vehicle. Did they go away for a weekend trip? Ask if they would recommend their hotel.

Being specific with your networking follow-up demonstrates that you were interested enough to remember the detail and ask about things that are important to them. The truth is, most people do not remember the details. Using this to your advantage will make you stand out from the vast majority of poor networkers.

Unless you have a photographic memory, it can be difficult to remember all the details about the people you meet. Get in the habit of making notes about your conversations after each encounter or meeting with a new person. The notes section of the contact eCard is the easiest place to do this. The mere act of writing down the specifics will help you to recall them when the opportunity comes up.

Once the relationship with a person develops, you'll have a history of topics to discuss and you shouldn't need to continue taking notes on that person.

03

CHAPTER

PART 3
WHAT ABOUT VIRTUAL OFFICES?

"HOW CAN I ORGANIZE MYSELF TO BENEFIT FROM MY VIRTUAL OFFICE?"

Attorneys who have chosen a virtual office, as opposed to a physical office, should expect to derive the same substantial economic benefit from their office rental. In fact, if you are not using your virtual office strategically, you are likely leaving tens of thousands of dollars of easy-to-find client referrals on the table each year.

In most executive office centers, virtual office clients are an untapped wealth of referral possibilities.

The practice of law is a cerebral effort that requires frequent interaction with other attorneys for help with practice issues, client management issues or marketing ideas. That's why small firm attorneys tend to rent office shared office space where you get access to those resources and connections, right where you work. It's the same reason we join networking groups and bar association committees.

The other virtual office lawyers in your center need the connection with other lawyers as much as you do. They are also coming across cases that they can't handle that need to be referred out to attorneys like you.

You already share unique commonalities with your virtual office colleagues from which to base a relationship:

1. You are an attorney;
2. Who is self-employed attorney; and
3. Has opted to take advantage of a very economical and non-traditional workspace environment.

When it comes to organizing yourself to maximize networking and referral possibilities in a virtual office, the same principles apply as with a traditional office rental; however, the execution is a bit different.

The biggest challenge for the virtual office lawyer is getting known by your peers. No one can send you referrals if they don't know who you are. Virtual office clients do not have the luxury of being around the office every day mingling with suite mates. Sometimes geographical distance is a hurdle to overcome. There is a little bit of extra effort required, but the results are well worth it.

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL OFFICE?

A Virtual Office is a low cost office rental arrangement where you rent the use of office space and related services on an a la carte basis. They are typically used by home-based attorneys or by law firms that have a main base of operations in one place, but require an office presence somewhere else where they won't be every day (i.e., if your main office is in Florida, but you also need an office address in Manhattan). With a Virtual Office, you pay a low monthly fee (our packages start at $99) for use of a premium commercial office address and mail collection services. Plus you get access to conference rooms to meet clients or offices to work when you're in town. Since virtual office attorneys work mostly from someplace else, they rent conference room and office space, as and when they need them in hourly or daily increments.

GET ON THE OFFICE DIRECTORY.

Many virtual office providers have client directories they sometimes post around the office or online. If there is a place for you to describe what you do, make sure you include your practice area expertise in lieu of describing yourself simply as an attorney. If you are given a little more room, use the profile to communicate your "elevator pitch". Make it short, to the point, and memorable.

If your provider doesn't have a directory, ask if they would consider putting one together, or would allow you to do so.

GET TO KNOW WHICH LAWYERS IN THE OFFICE COULD MOST LIKELY BE A GOOD REFERRAL PARTNER.

Take a look through the office directory and flag any professional who you think you could potentially send referrals to, or who could possibly send referrals to you. Rank these people by who you could most likely exchange referrals and organize a list so you can start to make an effort to meet these people.

ATTEND COMMUNITY EVENTS.

Office centers typically hold community events every so often. Make a point to go to these, especially when you first join. Bring you list of potential referral partners and have an office center employee introduce you to some of the people on your list.

MAXIMIZE YOUR VISITS TO THE OFFICE.

The more often people see your face in the office center, the more likely you are to strike up conversations with the other attorneys. Every time you are in the office, whether for a client meeting or to pick up your mail, do a "walk-around" like we discussed in the Step 2 of the previous section. Say hello to the people you know, and introduce yourself to the people you don't. Make a point to try to meet one person on your preferred client list every time you come to the office. If possible, ask a staff member to introduce you and schedule a time to meet with this person before or after your meeting.

GET TO KNOW THE OFFICE STAFF, THEY ARE YOUR EASIEST ACCESS TO REFERRAL OPPORTUNITIES.

The office staff is going to be your best resource in shared office space. The staff deals with every client, and is frequently in the middle of a potential opportunity when it comes up. You would be surprised just how often clients come to us to ask us for an introduction to a lawyer to whom they can send a referral (or even ask a question). Make sure every member of the office staff knows who you are, what your practice area is, and why types of clients you service. The more specific you can make this description, the more likely they will remember what you do.

Remember to be kind to the staff. They are there to help you, and sometimes when your practice gets busy and things go wrong (because something always does), it's easy to take out your frustrations on the office staff. But they are human, and if you do this too often you will quickly get a bad reputation. It's the quickest way to find yourself outside the office referral loop.

BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND ATTIRE.

One of the perks of working for yourself is the fact that you set your own dress code. Few people want to put on a suit if they are not going to court or meeting with a client. However, while it may be appropriate to work in your gym clothing at your home office, consider changing into something more "work appropriate" whenever you visit your virtual office center.

The rules are a bit different for attorneys who rent a traditional office space and are typically in the office every day. On Tuesday, their colleagues may see them in shorts and a t-shirt, but on Wednesday, they will be in a suit ready for voir dire. They get a "free-pass" on casual attire because of their constant interaction with suite mates. As a virtual office client, you will not likely have the benefit of constant interaction in the office to offset your casual attire with business attire the next visit.

No one wants to work with a schlub. A fast way to alienate yourself from a potential referral source is to "not look like a lawyer", even though you may be exceedingly competent. Dress decent when you are going to the office. This doesn't mean wearing a suit or heels, but at the very least follow the business casual norms for your geographical area. If you dress to be taken seriously then you will be taken seriously.

NETWORK WITH OTHER VIRTUAL CLIENTS.

Reach out to your virtual office colleagues, starting with the attorneys on your referral possibility list.

You are not a burden. If you perceive your efforts (phone-calls and emails) to other attorneys as a burden, then you do not understand your own value (which is the subject of a whole other e-book). A big reason attorneys rent in shared law office space is because they like the idea of being able to connect with a community of other attorneys like them. Most attorneys in shared law office space want to connect with other attorneys, so don't be reluctant to reach out to your peers.

When you email or call your colleagues, organize your approach.

1. Make it clear that you have a shared connection: you both have chosen a particular shared law office space.
2. Tell them a little about why you are reaching out to them: similar practice areas; or an interesting fact you read about them on an office profile.
3. Attempt to schedule an informal meeting: ask them to meet for a coffee.

Once you make the initial connection, follow the basic networking principals of Steps 1 through 6 in Part 2, above.

Reminder: Never underestimate the value of a colleague or potential referral source. Virtual office clients and in-office clients should maximize their referral networks by utilizing each other.

04

CHAPTER

PART 4 GET PHYSICAL WITH YOUR JUNK.

"Is it really possible to keep a law office neat?"

As discussed above, physical organization works hand-in-hand with social organization. Being physically organized allows you to maximize the time that you have available to put your social organization in practice. The more time you can spend on marketing and networking activities, the faster your practice will grow.

Chances are if you've gotten this far in your career, you probably already have a preference for how you like to organize your practice. But, even the most sophisticated organizational systems can benefit from some fine-tuning. Keep these three rules in mind as you begin to organize your office.

Rule #1:
Everything in your office should have a purpose and place.

Form should follow function. As such, make sure everything in your office has a purpose and a place. For each object, consider how it will help you run your practice more effectively, both in the present and into the future. Ask yourself the question: how will this help you meet your future goals?

Rule #2:
Take time to do it right the first time and every time.

When setting up a new office space, you have the unique chance to create a custom plan and execute it to your exacting standards. But, it's never too late to make a big overhaul of your systems. In fact, you should always interact with your office as if it's a constantly evolving system that is there to help you. By taking a few seconds or minutes to maintain the system's organization in the moment, you will be saving yourself future headaches, embarrassment, and the potential loss of clients.

Rule #3:

Help your future-self do a better job, and you will feel good about your past self.

Too many of us fall into the procrastination trap: "Oh, I'll just do that later." By putting achievable tasks off today, you're piling up work for yourself tomorrow. What happens when tomorrow comes and you have to draft an Order to Show Cause plus meet with a client last minute? Tomorrow quickly turns into the day after tomorrow. And then the next thing you know you are on an episode of *Hoarders*.

At the very least, there is a high likelihood of becoming disorganized and losing money. It's okay to wait until a slow part of the day to do all of your filing. But it's not okay to get into the habit of scheduling your procrastination. You may think that 5 minutes wasted here and there looking for a document has no consequence right? Well, that behavior adds up to a lost hour throughout the course of a week.

How much do you charge your client's for a billable hour? Can you really afford to lose that money?

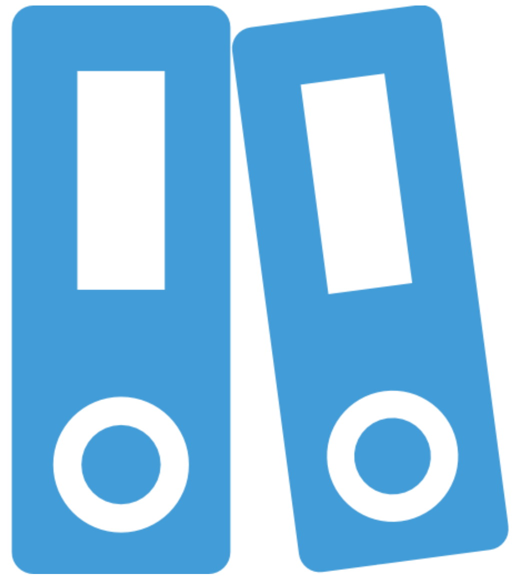
Don't let necessity dictate organization, which will only make it a dreaded chore. Instead, make "being neat" a part of your routine.

How to control your paper.

Now that you've furnished and decorated your new office, it's time to bring in your files. We'll cover both paper and paperless methods of filing, but consider using a healthy mix of both. You may want to have current client files as paper copies in case your computer freezes up while you're on the phone with a client, or so that you can easily take the whole folder down to a peer's office to ask for legal advice. But after a case is complete, scan those paper files and save them on your computer. Get a simple offsite backup system like Dropbox. It's an inexpensive solution to avoid worry about storage space or loss from fire or theft.

The best way to keep your paper files under control is to allow each case file to grow with the case, and your filing system to grow with your caseload. We will discuss two systems here. The first is binder-based and the second is filing cabinet-based.

The Binder System



The binder system goes like this: when you first begin working on a project or with a client, store the related information in a manila folder. Put this manila folder in easy reach, so that you can access it quickly. Over time, this folder will become full. Before it becomes unwieldy, transfer the documents to a binder. This binder should be organized with tabs to separate the information. The first few pages should be client information, followed by tabs for research, correspondence, case notes and invoicing.

Using this organizational method, you'll be able to see how many projects you have in the "manila folder" stage and how many are in the "binder stage" at a glance. All of your manila folders can sit on a rack on your desk, and all of your binders should be the same color, and can sit on a shelf or on top of a cabinet behind your desk. Once a case or project is complete, the binder can be emptied and used again. Just flip through it and shred any documents you no longer need. The rest can be clipped or rubber banded together and stored in an archival box.

The Filing Cabinet System

The filing cabinet system works in much the same way as the binder system. As soon as you are contacted by a new client, create a hanging folder in your filing cabinet for the client. Put the tab label on the front of the hanging file folder and place individual manila folders behind it. The front folder should have the client's information in it, including contact information and any other notes. The folders after that can be for cases, research, correspondence and notes, as well as invoices and other information

Tip: Color coding

Both of these systems can be enhanced with color coding. Choose colors that appeal to you, and keep it professional. If you handle French-speaking immigration cases, maybe the blue folders are for French nationals, red for Canada, and green for Haiti, etc. If you are on retainer with a company, you might keep all of your files in manila folders except for the ones related to that company, which are all in blue folders, or in manila folders with blue labels along the top.

These are only suggestions; make a system that works for you. But set up your files so that when you eventually hire a secretary or paralegal, he or she can easily be trained in how your system works. Chronological and alphabetical systems are universal, and will require minimal training.

If you do have more than one person working out of your office, provide a physical inbox for each person. You can purchase a three-tiered inbox at any office supply store. Mail and files can be transferred between you more easily.

And remember, once files are moved to your archival boxes, they should still be kept orderly. You're keeping archives because you will one day need to access them. Make this process easier by labeling them and keeping them in good order.

Keep it within arm's reach.

The trick to office organization is to keep the system constantly evolving to best suit your current needs. You need a system that works for you when you're most busy.

The Ringing Phone Exercise

So picture this scenario: you were down the hall talking with a fellow officemate and you heard your phone ringing. You ran back down the hall and picked it up on the last ring, expecting it to be someone you were waiting to hear back from. Instead it was an upset client. You need to move around your desk, grab her file, and take notes on what she's telling you, and you need to do it fast. So within reach of your phone, you should always have a few pens and a notepad, your to-do list, and current client files.

The point of this exercise is to shake up your thinking about what to place within arm's reach. If it's something that you use many times throughout the day, it needs to be on or in your desk. If it's something that you use once a day or so, it's okay to store in a cabinet beside your desk. Anything else will go in cabinets away from your desk to reserve closer space for the essentials. Weekly-use files should be within easier reach in these cabinets than monthly-use files.

This is relatively easy to set up, but takes a little more effort and planning to maintain. You just have to be self-aware. If you find yourself getting up every day to access a file that's stored in the "month zone," move it to the "day zone." If you are constantly opening a drawer to get out your stapler and then put it back, just keep it on the desk. If you have a tape dispenser on your desk that's collecting dust, put it in a cabinet or a drawer. You're not using it enough for it to be taking up valuable desk real estate.

Managing your day-to-day.

Now that you have your office and your filing system set-up, it's time to think about your habits and daily activities. How can you act on the system to improve it?

Staying abreast of this will involve three elements: calendaring, to-do lists, and organizing before and after each activity. We will discuss calendaring in the next major section, but for now what you need to know is that the calendar will be the source of your master to-do list.

Be a finisher not a starter. Keep a master to-do list.

The master to-do list is a rolling list of all of the projects you are working on. You may want to have it on a dry erase board so that you can see a constant snapshot of what you should be working on, or you might want to use a personal daily planner or legal pad to rewrite it every day. There are also some great electronic to-do list options available.

The most important rule of your master to-do list is that nothing ever leaves it without satisfactory completion. If you have something on your to-do-list for months, you don't just get to check it off or erase it for no good reason. If it made it onto your to-do list, you should accomplish it, unless you encounter extenuating circumstances that change the validity of the project.

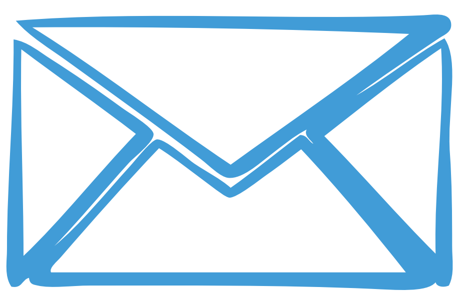
We explained that the master to-do list is sourced from your calendar, but it is also a primary source in itself for your daily to-do lists. Each morning when you arrive in the office, you should begin by reading over your master to-do list and thinking about the subprojects you can complete that day to make headway on the master to-do list projects. These will be the first items on your daily to-do list.

The mailbox rule.

Next, open and sort your mail into three categories:

1. To-file,
2. To-read,
3. To-contact.

Open and sort all of the mail before you act on any of it. There may be conflicting messages (remember the dreaded Mailbox Rule from your 1L days?), or one letter's priority may usurp another's. Once the mail is sorted, check your voicemail. Write down all pertinent information from each specific voicemail message onto your daily to-do list so that you can immediately delete the messages.



A note on voice mailbox organization:

It may sound obvious, but your voice mailbox should be prioritized and organized in the same way as your physical mailbox. We live in a digital age which allows us to save messages for a time period greater than eternity.

No client will ever get to the "retainer agreement stage" if they cannot contact you because your voicemail is full. DELETE YOUR MESSAGES. Follow the rules above:

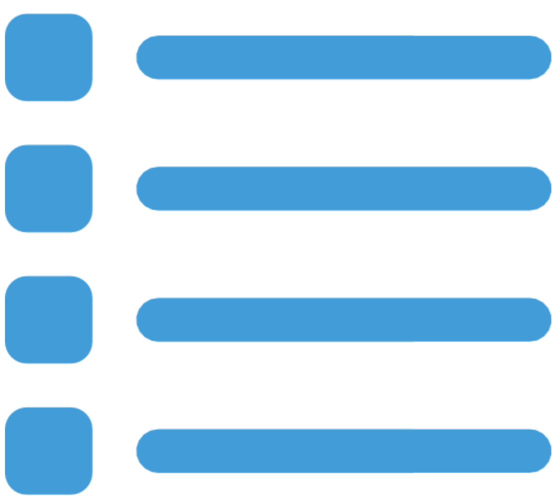
1. Check your voice messages.
2. Take physical notes on the pertinent aspects of each voice message.
3. Place the transcribed notes into the client's file for reference.
4. Delete the client message, unless it is extremely important.
5. Hire someone to do this for you if you don't like doing it yourself!

Batch your phone calls in the morning.

Next, add the prioritized contact list to your daily to-do list. It's time to make your morning phone calls. It is easiest to accomplish this in one big batch.

Pull the files related to each of these clients to reference them while you're on the phone. Jot down on your to-do list the times that you called each person, and if you left a message.

Once your phone calls are complete, read and file the rest of your mail. Update your to-do list if needed. Clear your desk of any files you won't need to access again today.



Stay on top of the organization as you go about your day.

As you progress through your work day, pull files as needed and return them to their cabinets as needed. After each project, clear your desk entirely to begin the next project on a clean work space. Doing this may seem cumbersome at first, but these actions will become second nature in no time.

When you return to your office after lunch, look over your daily to-do list to make sure nothing pressing falls through the gaps. At the end of the day, begin your to-do list for the next day. Clear your desk and head home after a day of good hard work!

Improve your systems a little at a time.

Organizing is easy when you don't slack off. A little bit at a time is all it takes to keep things running smoothly.

You'll walk by the offices of other lawyers drowning in paperwork and smile to yourself, thankful that's not happening to your practice.

But, what if it does?

If you find yourself covered up in the files you neglected to organize last week or last month, just take some time to catch up. In fact, most of us plan for this scenario and schedule time for catch-up in our weekly planners. We pick our slowest half hour, whether it's a Tuesday morning or a Friday afternoon, and that's when we catch up on all of our slacking for the week.

And here's a dirty little secret: that cycle of falling behind and catching back up can actually be better for your overall organization! It may seem counterintuitive, but when you interact with your systems for a half hour straight, you notice little eddies of efficiency that had slipped past your observation when you were organizing in the moment.

You may notice that you filed everything except a certain type of file, and when filing several of those in a row you notice that the cabinet is hard to access, or the hinge squeaks. You have been normalizing inefficient behavior. Fix that, and you're back to filing in the moment. This is your chance to make the improving tweaks to your system.

You have to notice the squeaky wheel to be able to grease it.

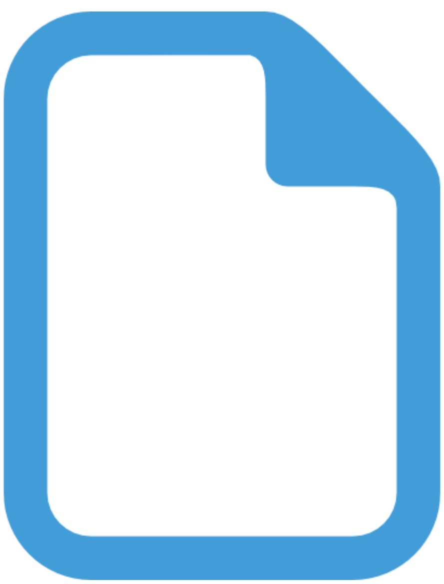
Every time you re-organize your office, make it a little better than it was before. Look around for the stagnant piles. Ask yourself if you still need things. How often do you use this tool? Can you access that binder full of information more easily online? Does this marketing plan fit your current practice and/or your goals for your firm? Will it advance what you are seeking to achieve?

If you can't answer these questions satisfactorily, it may be time to cut the dead weight. Make an archival box of potential throw-away items and files. If after a few months you haven't accessed them, then you were right - you don't really need them. Toss them!

Thoughts on organizing your electronic files.

Lawyers are generally good about keeping our paper files in order. It's the electronic files we have trouble with, especially if you are coming from a firm that had a file storage system that did this for you.

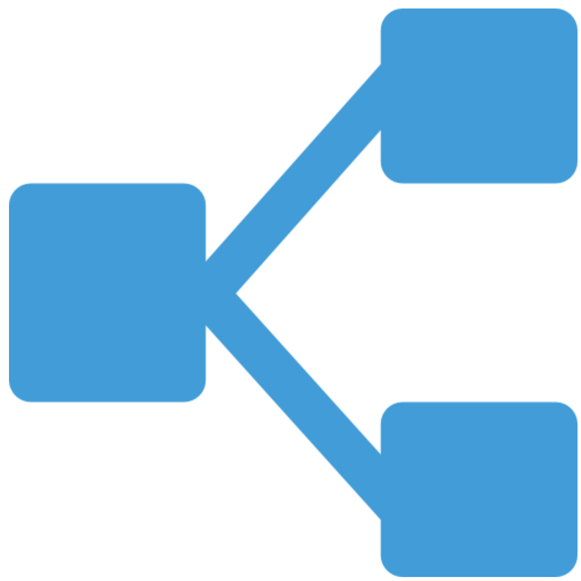
Maybe it's because no one can see what a big mess our computers are, like they can with our paper files. Maybe it's because we were never taught best practices. The sad fact remains that for most lawyers, our computer filing systems are heavily flawed. This costs countless hours of productivity, which results in lost profits. Keep your files in order by implementing the following system.



Keep a standardized folder hierarchy.

Your folder tree should work for you, much like the paper filing system we discussed earlier. In the "My Documents" folder of your computer, set up major sub-folders. These should be along the lines of the following:

- Clients
- Accounting/Billing
- Administrative Items
- Marketing
- Personal
- Prospective Clients
- Engagement Agreements
- Vendors
- Forms



There may be more categories. These are just to give you an idea of the major folders that many self-employed attorneys use.

Maximize use of subfolders.

Within each of these folders, set up nested subfolders. For example, in the "Clients" folder, create a folder for each of your clients. You may also include an excel spreadsheet summarizing your entire client list with more details. You should not file a document called "Template - Follow-up Letter to Client.docx" in the main "Clients" folder. This file should go in a folder called "Templates."

Make your system so easy to use that if you forgot everything you set up; you'd still be able to sit down and use it. Inside each of the individual client folders, set up additional subfolders for individual cases involving that client. The client subfolder is an appropriate location for "loose" files regarding that client. Inside the individual subfolders of the client cases, you might have loose files as well as more subfolders, such as "Accident Photos."

Save individual files with relatively similar file names.

The beauty of the electronic filing tree is that it can go on into infinity. Go for specialization. If you have more than twenty files in one folder, they should all be the same file type and have relatively similar file names, as would be the case with the photos in the "Accident Photos" subfolder.

Use as much description as possible to label your files. "Template - Follow-up Letter to Client" is a better file name than "Client Letter." "John Smith Accident Report - 03- 09-2013" is a better file name than "John Smith Report 03-09." Dates can be helpful in file names. For example, in John Smith's client folder, there may be an "Invoices" folder, and those file names might read "John Smith Invoice - 03-2013," "John Smith Invoice - 04-2013," and "John Smith Invoice - 05-2013." These are easy to read and will sort well both alphabetically and chronologically. You can easily sort your folders by name and by date, so don't worry about needlessly naming a file with the date of its creation.

Save frequently, and save different 'versions' of a working document.

When saving a document, click "Save As" and open the folder you want to save it to. Once you've navigated yourself there, name the file. This way you can make sure you've used the same word order, spaces, and dashes as the other related files so that they will sort well. Save your files frequently, and don't be afraid to save new versions of old documents. For example, if you're working on a contract, you may save the file as "Williamson Contract 01." After another half hour of saving regularly to that file name, the document has changed significantly enough to be named "Williamson Contract 02." Now you have both files in your folder. If you really mess up the formatting in "Williamson Contract 02," you can always go back to "Williamson Contract 01." Once the contract is the way you like it, delete the previous versions or put them in a subfolder called "Previous Versions." Once you have your final document, save it as "Williamson Contract Final" or just "Williamson Contract."

Back-up your files regularly.

In addition to saving your files frequently, you should back up your files regularly. The easiest way is to pay for a program that automatically backs up your "My Documents" folder over the cloud to an offsite server. This will save the headache of lost files from a computer crash or an office disaster.

Your calendar should be your best friend.

A calendar is absolutely indispensable to any professional. It's astounding that some lawyers still don't use calendars regularly. Every professional event should be added to a calendar. Your calendar should be your day's roadmap. Add both individual events and recurring events. We also recommend including details of each event and planning far into the future, both of which are made easier by using an electronic calendar rather than a traditional paper version. An electronic calendar can also be synced across multiple platforms, making it available for updating no matter when or where you are, if you have access to a smartphone or computer.

The best asset to using an electronic calendar is the ability to add alerts and reminders to your events. Set up a reminder a month before a multi-year contract renews so that you have plenty of time to research competition to negotiate a better deal. Set up recurring events with reminders for payroll and invoice cycles.

Utilize your calendar as a way to hold yourself accountable for long-term goals. At the beginning of the year, set your professional goals, and mark these "accomplishment due dates" with alerts on your calendar so that you stay true to them during the daily grind. You can go as far into the future as you like, and you can use calendars for soft dates too. If your annual conference is always the second weekend in May, just add it as an event in all future years with question marks after the title until the date becomes firm.

Consider using a calendar with alerts for the following instances:

- Meetings with clients
- Networking events
- Recurring events
- Yearly industry events
- Multi-year contracts
- Vacation and personal time planning
- Goal-setting
- Project tracking

Also, don't forget that you can look back in your calendar just as easily as you look forward. Calendars can be excellent tools for tracking sick days and project progress for review later.

When you set up an event in your calendar, include all relevant details. In most online calendars, you can include a location, contacts who will be attending, and notes. In the notes section add information like directions, pass codes, confirmation numbers, and phone numbers of attendees. If your online calendar syncs to your phone, you'll have all of the emergency information you might need if you're stuck in traffic or can't get through a gate.

When it comes to tracking your billable time, find a system that you will stick with.

Tracking time can be the most loathsome part of our job. It's tedious, and at times mind numbing. But if you get lazy about it, you end up losing thousands of dollars a month in lost billable time.

Find a system that is the least burdensome to you, and stick to it. The key is that you must keep track of the time immediately after you finish a task. If you fail to do this, you will eventually lose track of your billable hours and neglect to charge a client for the hard work you have performed.

Some lawyers prefer to keep their billing system open and just enter the time in directly into the billing system after they finish a task. If this works for you, it saves a ton of time at the end of the month when it comes time for billing.

Some lawyers hate having their billing system open on their desktop. They don't want to see their billing system open on their desktop all day long eating up RAM. This system doesn't work for them. I fall into this category.

When it comes to tracking your billable time, find a system that you will stick with.

Currently, I use a system where I send an email to myself right after I finish a task. My email utility sits open on my desktop all day anyway. When I finish a task, I open a new email window. I type "Time" into the Subject line, write the time spent, client name and tasks performed in the body of the email and send it to myself. I have a rule set up in my inbox that automatically moves these emails into a separate folder.

At the end of the month, I copy and paste the time entries into our firm's billing system (or I ask an assistant to do it).

Is it unorthodox, yes, but it's the method that works best for me.

My law partner keeps a legal pad on his desk that he enters billing information on after completing a task. At the end of the month, he types it up into a word document for our assistants to enter into our billing software. Duplicative work, yes. All billable time captured? Absolutely!

A friend of mine does something similar, but he keeps pre-printed forms on his desk.

We know attorneys who use spreadsheets, Outlook Tasks, or who jot time down in margins of documents. Again, the key to timekeeping success is finding a system that keeps you recording billable time immediately after you finish tasks.

How to battle email inbox creep.

Even if you follow all of the rules we've just outlined, an unorganized email inbox can still hold you back. It's easy for our inboxes to get loaded down with nonsense because our email addresses are relatively public. If spam is getting in between you and your important client emails, your productivity is suffering.

Take the time once a day to battle this inbox creep. Don't just delete spam; mark it as junk mail so that your email system can learn not to allow it into your inbox anymore. And if you receive a lot of subscription emails from electronic mailing lists and sites like LinkedIn, unsubscribe from them. There are links at the bottom of these emails that take you to the website where you can choose to either unsubscribe entirely, or cut down on the amount of emails you receive per day or per week.

Your email program can also be customized to display messages from certain people in different colors, or to automatically direct emails from clients into their respective folders, bypassing the inbox entirely. Imagine your inbox presorted into folders, and you don't have to lift a finger!

It's also easy to flag an email as a task, which can be viewed in the task bar of most email programs. This can be a useful electronic to-do list to assist you in your email management. Proper inbox maintenance can help keep spam and lost emails from becoming a problem. But if it's already too late for you, you may want to invest in a step-by-step guide to clearing out your inbox entirely.

CONCLUSION

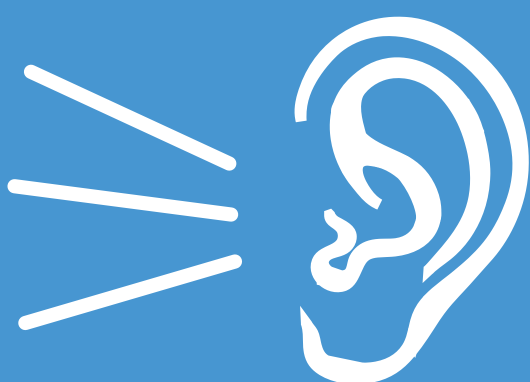
A shared law office space can be a gold mine of client referrals for lawyers. Following the tips above, you can organize your physical space as well as your social routine to financially leverage the best of what your shared law office can offer.

You've chosen to surround yourself by hardworking and driven lawyers who have taken the same career path as you, and who can assist you along your path to continued success.

With the right combination of social and physical organization, the referrals will begin to flow and your profits will begin to grow, all while you make great friends with officemates. Welcome to an environment where you can truly thrive among your peers.

LAW FIRM SUITES GIVES ME...

- ✓ Referrals to offset my rent.
- ✓ Collaboration with other lawyers just like me.
- ✓ Easy networking while I work.
- ✓ Staff that's like an extension of my firm.



SOUND TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

IT'S NO LEGAL FICTION! COME SEE FOR YOURSELF.

We'll show exactly how our law office services will help your practice.

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