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L A W P R A C T I C E M A N A G E M E N T

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## Self-assessment for your firm

By Tamara Philabaum



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As an owner or managing partner, you are ultimately responsible for assuring that the firm's management processes are effective and efficient. Truth be told, you are never "done" establishing and improving your administrative procedures. Whether your firm is just getting started or has been around for decades, it is helpful to periodically assess how the firm is being managed and identify areas that need to

be established or improved.

All four cornerstones of the firm should be examined: Marketing & Sales, Human Resources, Finance & Accounting and Production. In each of these categories, there are essential tools that need to be in place to position your firm for success and growth. Ideally, you should meet with your firm administrator or office manager annually to answer the following questions. See the self-assessment charts on the following pages.

After completing the self-assessment, you can set goals for the coming year by prioritizing those items where you disagree. Assign responsibility to one individual within the organization for creating and implementing an action plan for achieving each goal. Also, establish focus groups where appropriate. Then, periodically check in with the assigned individual to make sure they are making progress. By repeating this process each year, you will establish a culture of continuous self-assessment and process improvement for your firm's administrative functions. ■

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**MARKETING**

My firm ...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
has a Marketing Plan that specifies goals, strategies, assigned tasks, and due dates.					
has defined the ideal client avatar that guides decisions about marketing channels.					
has an online presence that attracts the right clients when they search on Google, Bing, and other browsers.					
has developed an appropriate social media program on Facebook and/or LinkedIn.					
has created top-of-mind awareness through participation in community activities & professional organizations.					
has provided training to associates on how to network and market themselves.					
participates in attorney rating systems and publicizes the results.					
has developed a branding strategy to create a consistent look and image across all facets of the organization.					
has a mechanism for collecting and responding to client feedback.					
strengthens client relationships through entertainment, meals, and customer service.					
has a client relationship management system that tracks leads by referral source and marketing channel.					
has a defined process for following up on leads and closing sales.					
has evaluated the cost of acquisition and/or return on investments for its marketing spend.					

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

My firm ...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
provides each employee with a job description so that they clearly understand their responsibilities.					
has a documented compensation plan that guides salary offers and pay adjustments.					
uses a performance management system for both support staff and attorneys.					
takes actions to increase or maintain employee satisfaction.					
offers competitive salary and benefits.					
has a method for calculating staffing needs that allows us to avoid excessive overtime or downtime and plan for future hiring needs.					
uses effective recruiting and hiring methods.					
effectively onboards and trains new employees.					
provides ongoing training to attorneys and support staff.					
requires non-exempt employees to document time worked each week.					
has an established employee handbook that is accessible to all employees.					

**FINANCE & ACCOUNTING**

My firm ...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
creates an annual budget and uses it for fiscal control.					
projects cashflow and manages debt effectively.					
assures that attorneys and paralegals enter all billable and nonbillable time daily.					
obtains signed engagement agreements for all new matters.					
effectively recovers soft costs associated with client work such as copies, scans, and research.					
maintains an accurate account of the funds held in trust that is regularly reconciled with the bank statement.					
is reimbursed for all client costs advanced.					
reviews and understands monthly financial reports including P&L, Balance Sheet, Cash Flow, and timekeeper profitability.					
has a written policy on expense control that designates who can authorize purchases at specific price points.					
monitors inventory reports and effectively manages aging WIP and AR.					
bills all clients at least monthly.					
has an established system for collecting aged accounts receivable.					
uses a financial dashboard to track trends in key performance metrics.					

**PRODUCTION**

My firm ...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
follows a specific, defined client intake procedure.					
follows a specific, defined client onboarding procedure.					
follows a specific, defined calendaring procedure.					
uses templates, styles, and smart tags for creating documents.					
can easily locate closed files when needed.					
can easily locate current case files.					
follows a documented file retention policy.					
makes full use of our case management system's functionality.					
maintains all forms of client communications in one central location accessible to the entire legal team.					
has a system for documenting, implementing, and organizing policies and procedures.					
evaluates the profitability of all attorneys and paralegals.					
provides ongoing training to employees as needed to learn new technology and other skills.					
follows a documented method for regularly reviewing the status of all open cases.					
follows a documented method for closing cases.					