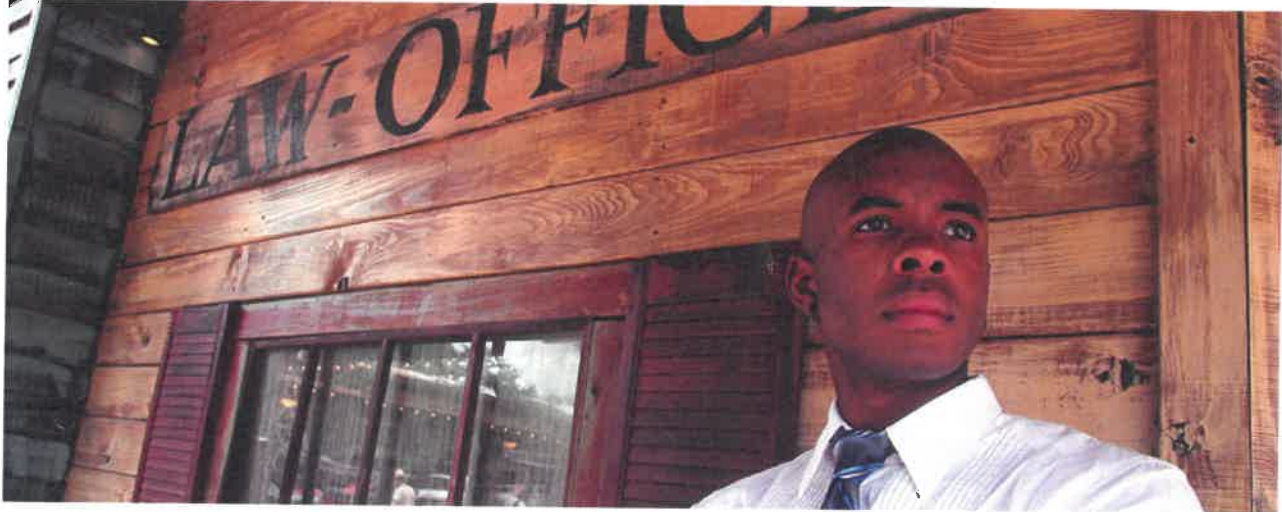


# 4 Reasons Young Lawyers Should Consider Going Solo

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by NWSidebar



I'm a young lawyer. I started law school in 2010, which was a scary time to be entering the profession. Jobs had disappeared and a scarcity mindset had taken root. I was relieved when I managed to find work, first as an appellate clerk, and then at several mid-size Seattle firms. But relief and satisfaction are two very different things and, after three years in private practice, I still wasn't satisfied with my firm job.

So, just last August, I quit and started a solo practice.

It wasn't the obvious choice – I had no clients and no experience running a business. But what I did have were supportive mentors who gave me the tools I needed to construct my own model. Pretty soon I had a website; then clients started calling; and after four months on my own, revenues exceeded expenses.

Most importantly, I was satisfied with the work – so satisfied, in fact, that I feel compelled to share why going solo was right for me (and why it could be right for other young lawyers).

## 1. You Will Master the Business of Law

It's no secret that the traditional law school curriculum teaches students nothing about the business of being a lawyer. Too often, this error is compounded by the traditional law firm model in which young lawyers learn a lot about reviewing documents, researching case law, and writing memos, but precious little about the business side of a firm.

Starting your own firm is a shortcut to mastering the business of law. You'll have to learn, by necessity, how to write a business plan, develop a marketing strategy; create key performance indicators, track conversion rates, and so much more.

You'll make lots of mistakes and learn from them along the way. But if your experience is like mine, even after six short months, you'll see a radical transformation in your breadth of knowledge and skillset. These things will continue to serve you well, whether you remain a solo practitioner or eventually join forces with a larger firm.

## **2. You Can Value Your Values**

Many of the lawyers I've met have an uncommonly sturdy set of values. Becoming a lawyer was, for many of them, a chance to build a vocation around their values. For these types, law school, with its focus on seminal U.S. Supreme Court cases, tended to confirm that they were entering a profession where they could lead with those values.

Then they joined a big firm. Or a government agency. Or another large organization. There, they realized that as a junior lawyer, whether in the public or private sector, you have little say in the values your organization promotes.

Going solo, in contrast, affords an opportunity to embed your values into the model you build. For example, I value organizations devoted to social and cultural enrichment. To support these organizations, I incorporated a sliding-scale fee model into my pricing structure, which allows me to offer reduced rates to those who need services but can't necessarily pay market rates. Leading with my values in this way has been one of the early joys of the solo experience.

## **3. You Get to Get Creative**

I was a creative writing major in college. My career plan seemed modest enough at the time: write the next great American novel. It turned out my plan wasn't foolproof and so, despite some misgivings, I applied to law school, thinking that at least legal writing could be a creative outlet. But that was rarely the case – at first.

Starting my own practice has given me good reason to revive my creative writing skills. Through blogging, I can demonstrate expertise to potential clients while increasing my website's search engine rankings. I enjoy writing, so it rarely feels like a chore to blog, especially when a new prospect calls after reading my latest, or when one of my posts hits the first page on Google.

Writing interesting and useful content has been the creative outlet I hoped to find as a lawyer. Of course, there are many other ways to tap into your own creativity that can help you connect with people and build your practice. The fun is in figuring out how to use your unique skills to reach your ideal client.

## 4. You're Free to Find Your Ideal Client

No matter what you do as a practicing lawyer, you will have clients, and these clients will occupy a significant place in your professional life. Given the choice, it would be better to like and respect your clients than to merely tolerate them in exchange for their business.

When I opened my firm, I got some advice that's shaped my approach to marketing: "Tell at least one person a day who your ideal client is." The directive is to be bold, yes, but also targeted in your marketing. You're not just looking for anyone who's willing to pay your fee – you want someone who's a good fit for you.

The day I started helping clients I truly cared for was the day I knew continuing to do so was the only way to build a healthy and satisfying practice for the long haul.

### **The Takeaway: Long-Term Satisfaction Over Short-Term Security**

Starting your own firm is scary as a young lawyer. Success isn't guaranteed and you'll do battle with insecurity every day. But the satisfaction to be found in building something that's your own is hard to top.

#### *About the Author*



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