

OCBA'S SOLO PRACTITIONER/ SMALL FIRM SECTION: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

by DANA M. HEYDE

When members of the OCBA Solo Practitioner and Small Firm Section arrive at meetings, they feel as if they have come home. That's because there is an instant camaraderie between the members of this group. Sometimes being a Solo or Small Firm practitioner can feel like spending a day in a Twister! We get it. We get each other. We pull each other up. We mentor each other.

This Section isn't just for solo attorneys; we welcome attorneys from any size firm! Well, okay, maybe some of the attorneys at an uber large firm would not share the same angst we solo or small firm members have, but everyone is certainly welcome. Having more than five attorneys doesn't exclude you from the group. We'd love to welcome you to our Section.

The heart and soul of our Section is the ability for Sole Practitioners and Small Firms to network, as well as create lasting friendships and business collaborations. The personal networking experiences we provide are truly

irreplaceable. At the start of every Solo and Small Firm Event, everyone in the group introduces themselves.

This unique start to our Section meeting is a cornerstone to our dedication to fostering relationships. Time and time again, our members have expressed that their number one reason in attending Solo and Small Firm events is to network with other similarly situated attorneys. It has become the goal of this section to create an environment that encourages members to open up and get to know each other—once we get to know each other

and can talk comfortably, networking happens naturally! It is so refreshing to hear each member introduce themselves to the section and open the door for a personal connection.

Law school didn't teach us how to be business owners. Being a Solo or Small Firm owner brings with it a uniquely challenging business ownership component. When I have a technical issue, there isn't an IT manager to call—it's up to me to fix it. When I need a new employee, since I don't have a HR Director, I place an ad, hold the interviews, and make the hire. Of course, all of this takes time away from





my practice, which is frustrating. So, when I arrive at a Solo and Small Firm event, I know that everyone else in the room understands anything I've gone through because they've also gone through it.

The Solo and Small Firm events not only provide networking, but are focused on mentorship and education. Each component has a strong impact on the members.

Earlier this year, Suzanne Leslie and George Straggas put on an MCLE event that focused on Finders, Minders, and Grinders, which are three different, and very important, aspects that a Solo or Small Firm practitioner must master to be successful. This MCLE was an instant success because we understand all the different hats that a Solo and Small Firm owner wears. The hat of finder, the hat of grinder, the hat of minder, the hat of owner, the hat of administrator, the hat of HR Director, the hat of hiring manager, the hat of whatever has gone wrong today that needs to be fixed manager, the hat of rainmaker, the hat of superstar attorney. You get the point.

It was reassuring to hear from Suzanne Leslie, a Solo and Small Firm board member, as she described her journey from attorney to sole partner at a law firm. Her story of how she fought to be an equity partner, and just rebranded that large and thriving firm as the sole remaining owner was so inspiring. Experiences such as Suzanne's energize other section members to continue on their own journey of someone who is just starting out on their own but wants to grow to a fully staffed firm with multiple attorneys.

George Straggas gave a detailed presentation that adeptly described the many hats Solo and Small Firm owners wear. As a "Finder" we are tasked with the first challenge of any business,

to find clients. The "Minder" refers to the obligations of handling a case from start to finish and supervising younger attorneys and staff in performing fundamental legal work.

The heart and soul
of our Section is
the ability for
Sole Practitioners
and Small Firms
to network,
as well as create
lasting friendships
and business
collaborations.

"Grinders" refer to the attorney who is tasked with the role of getting it done, no matter the cost, no matter the hours. It falls to this person to ensure the pleading is filed, the calendaring

is done, or the file is opened.

Last month, the section meeting focused on how small firms could, and should, use AI. For many young attorneys, using AI comes naturally and is probably as instinctive as brushing your teeth. But for some members who have been attorneys for more than ten years, technology can still seem daunting. Some members wouldn't even be aware of ChatGPT, let alone know how to ask it a question. The demonstration showed how AI could simulate the work it would take an attorney several hours to perform. With the wave of a wand, information appeared! Research memorandums! Draft discovery! Document summaries! As you can imagine, being aware of how AI could transform a one-man show to perform the work of an entire Emerald City could be a game changer for some of our members,

The sage advice from seasoned members is always the same: Take one breath at a time. Keep moving forward. You can do it. So, the next time you feel like going home, click your heels together three times and come to a Solo and Small Firm Committee event!

Dana M. Heyde is a Partner at Cottle Keen Lopiccolo & Heyde, LLP, in Orange. She can be reached at dana@cckhlaw.com.

This article first appeared in Orange County Lawyer, August 2025 (Vol. 67 No. 8), p. 32. The views expressed herein are those of the author. They do not necessarily represent the views of Orange County Lawyer magazine, the Orange County Bar Association, the Orange County Bar Association Charitable Fund, or their staffs, contributors, or advertisers. All legal and other issues must be independently researched.