

MR. TOAD'S WILD RIDE ... OR THE NEWLY MINTED (SOLO) ATTORNEY'S WILD RIDE

By *Bradley N. Jeckering*

As a kid, I remember going to Walt Disney World and looking forward to any ride that would allow me to escape from the swamp-like, muggy atmosphere of central Florida. One of the more memorable air-conditioned retreats came in the form of "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride." The ride was fast, unpredictable and showered riders with a story filled with explosions, alcohol, police officers, angry judges and little demons ... all hurled as the rider sped along sharp turns and threatening trap doors.

Much like Mr. Toad, solo attorneys face a wide variety of practical and practice-related hurdles. As a newly licensed attorney who started his practice shortly after licensure, the business challenges, practical legal challenges and actual legal work can seem beyond your control and, at times, insurmountable.

Here's what I've learned on my wild ride:

Quality, Cheap Stuff Exists

Starting a law practice straight out of law school creates a variety of problems. From a financial perspective, a recent law graduate has extremely limited resources. Despite that fact, a 21st century business needs a website, some measure of online marketing and a company identity. I received several quotes from friends and friends-of-friends, all of which nearly caused immediate cardiac arrest.

I did some research on small business contractors and found an amazing website called freelancer.com. This site is filled with freelancers from around the globe who want to work for you. It is essentially outsourcing for the small business. All freelancers have ratings from previous employers, and their talents range from web design, graphic design, data entry and beyond. My website and graphic design work was done for around \$175. It is a beautiful

website (in my not-so-humble opinion) and I achieved a brand identity for 10 percent of the lowest friend-of-a-friend quote.

You'll Never Know Unless You Ask

"I don't know," and "I need help." These phrases are some of the most powerful words an attorney can utter when speaking with a clerk, bailiff or court staff. As a new attorney, one of the first lessons I learned was that the mechanics of law operate differently depending on where you are, geographically and judicially. What flies in Champaign County is foreign in Franklin County, and Municipal is different from Common Pleas.

Saying to the Clerk of Courts, "I need help," or "This is my first time doing ..." will generally make your life easier. I have heard that sometimes lawyers can be rude to court staff or try to save face by being overly demanding. I think this is a misguided tactic. Asking for help is a sure fire way to gain some sympathy points and to learn how to practice effectively in whatever court you're in. You're not the first new, inexperienced attorney ... don't be embarrassed. Say the magic words and learn. You'll be a better lawyer for it.

Falling Down Doesn't Hurt As Much As You'd Think

I operate two offices, one at Easton and one in Mechanicsburg, Ohio. When I started building my dream, Mechanicsburg, Ohio wasn't on the map. I had a very narrow idea of where I wanted to practice law. Late last year, I received a group email that went out to recent alumni regarding an opportunity in Mechanicsburg, and I figured I'd go check it out. Before I knew it, I had met an amazing pillar in the Ohio legal community, opened an office in Mechanicsburg and had paying clients walking in off the street (yes, you read that correctly, walking in).

Had I ignored that email or been too afraid to put myself out there, my career as a solo attorney may have been short lived. I took a calculated risk and was willing to accept the help of a very generous attorney. Taking risks and deviating from my original career path has enabled me to meet great people and to grow as an attorney. I'm glad I took the blinders off and took a risk in rural Ohio. Consider something that isn't on your road map and you might luck into your dream.

Riding Off The Rails

Like "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride," starting a solo or small practice can feel like you're speeding along with no idea of what is around the next corner. The reality is that there are an infinite number of practitioners, court staff and services available to help you manage whatever hurdle you face. Being humble, taking risks and expanding my horizons has allowed me to have an amazing start to my legal career. I encourage you to be willing to take the wild ride and realize you're not in this alone.

If you have questions about initial hurdles to opening a practice or practicing outside of Columbus, feel free to email me at brad@centralohiolegal.com.



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