A common misconception is that a lawyer has to work long hours, with little or no free time. Though that’s true in some cases, there are routes to a healthy work/life balance—in fact, attorney Zara Watkins has found one.

“I learned very early on that I don’t like offices, I don’t like commuting and that I need to control my time,” Watkins says.

Over a decade ago, Watkins started On Point Expertise, a legal practice that allows her to work almost exclusively from her home office. On Point Expertise is built on her research and writing skills, where she specializes in civil appeals in state, federal and immigration cases.

Working from home allows her to focus and work more efficiently to better serve her clients—often lawyers themselves seeking out Watkins’ expertise.

**A PATH TO WORK/LIFE BALANCE**

When she graduated law school and began working at a large firm, Watkins soon realized that the traditional model wasn’t going to work for her. She had to find another way.

Her solution? Figure out how to work from home.

“I decided that I was just going to do research and writing,” Watkins says. “And I started selling my services to other lawyers.”

The plan worked. As her practice grew, Watkins started handling more and more appellate work. Before long, she was working solely on appeal cases as clients became drawn to her specialized talents.

**FINDING HER GROOVE**

Despite her well-established skillset, Watkins admits her path wasn’t always so clear.

“If someone told me in law school that research and writing would be the primary part of my practice,” she jokes, “I would’ve thrown my law book at them.”

Upon graduation however, Watkins landed at a large law firm where she honed her research and writing skills by working alongside other talented attorneys—more importantly, she started to really, really enjoy what she was doing.

“I find it’s the most interesting part of the practice. It’s academic. It’s digging deeper into the laws...learning the evolution of legal doctrine and how to adjust it to different fact scenarios.”
HAVING LAWYERS AS CLIENTS
At the appellate level, Watkins explains that most of her clients are lawyers. Specifically, attorneys in small and solo firms that look to her research and writing abilities to gain an advantage. It’s a nice setup she says, because the attorneys don’t have to refer their clients to other lawyers during the appeal process—allowing them to retain the relationships they’ve built.

And while having lawyers as clients may sound problematic, Watkins says that’s not the case at all. Many of her clients seek her out to improve their comfort level of appellate law. “A lot of attorneys don’t understand how the appeal process works...because there’s a whole new set of rules.”

Watkins continues by saying that it’s easy to work with other lawyers because of their familiarity with the profession, stating that “lawyers understand how hard it is to manage deadlines, so I don’t get a lot of pressure from them.”

WORKING ON HER OWN
Watkins makes it clear that she enjoys working by herself, yet that’s not to say she’s isolated—she readily meets clients face-to-face whenever possible. But it’s at home, without distraction, where she really shines. “I’ve become a master at managing my schedule,” Watkins beams.

Indeed, that mastery improves her ability to accurately account for the time spent on projects, which ultimately impacts what she charges her clients. In fact, Watkins reveals that she’s able to maintain a flat rate for her services, which gives hiring lawyers some peace-of-mind come invoice time.

MAKING IT POSSIBLE
None of this would be possible, of course, without the advent of technology. Watkins is quick to point out that she stays on the leading edge. “Early on, I decided to be fully digital,” she says, boasting that she never prints a single piece of paper.

Regardless of technology however, hanging out her own shingle was a huge leap of faith. “It was very important to me to have the life that I wanted,” Watkins explains. “I had to do what I needed to do to have a lifestyle I could live with.”

And judging from the success On Point Expertise has enjoyed, her clients (and her client’s clients) are glad that she did.

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