Known by his friends and clients as Misha, Mikhail Lopez is a partner with Lee Lopez Law PLLC, a criminal defense and family law practice based in Northern Virginia. He and his partner are focused on providing close, personal attention to the firm’s clients, while still keeping their fees competitive.

The secret, he says, lies in efficiency. “The more efficient we are,” Lopez states, “the better we can help.”

A PATH TOWARDS EFFICIENCY

Early in his career at larger firms, Lopez saw a potential opportunity to streamline things. He felt that firms were often pretty inefficient, which resulted in unnecessary financial pressures being put on lawyers. “I envisioned something very different,” Lopez explains.

With just two full-time attorneys, Lee Lopez Law runs lean. But as he demonstrates, having a tighter process chain can actually reduce the chance for errors. For starters, they don’t have non-attorneys handling any legal work. “We want to avoid mistakes and confusion,” Lopez says, “the buck stops with the supervising attorney, no matter what.”

The firm also dispenses with extravagance. “At the end of the day, no client hires you because of the suit you wear or the car you drive,” he states.

TECHNOLOGY PLAYS A ROLE

No discussion of efficiency is complete without mentioning the role of evolving technology. For Lee Lopez Law, simply cutting down a 50-cent-per-fax fee made a huge impact. Technology has made it easier for the firm to store data too, further reducing expenses. For instance, being able to access documents electronically has mitigated a lot of the cost involved with printing physical copies.

Lopez says his legal research has become more efficient as well. He points to innovations in artificial intelligence that have made it easier and faster for him to find the key information. In fact, getting answers to complex legal questions quickly has proved a valuable component of the firm’s lean philosophy.

SERVICE IS STILL CRITICAL

But streamlining processes is not without its perils. To ensure the firm’s efficiency mantra doesn’t tread on customer service, Lopez highlights the role of client management. For starters, he’s quick to point out that efficiency can shorten the time a client has to wait for a response. That goes a long way towards client satisfaction and can offer a huge benefit over a larger firm.

Speed is only one facet of the firm’s good communication habits. “We strive to break things down in an easy to understand way, using basic language,” Lopez explains. He realizes that the law can be confusing to those not in the legal profession. “Here’s what it says,” Lopez quips. “This is what it means.”
Being a small shop offers other client-facing advantages as well. By eliminating intermediaries, the firm's attorneys communicate directly with the client. Working in close contact together, it becomes easy to build more personal relationships.

In particular, Lopez alludes to the importance of the personal dynamic within family law, stating that “it can involve just as much counseling and psychology as it does legal work.”

**STRIKING THE BALANCE**

All told, while Lopez promotes a strong culture of efficiency within the firm, the genesis of the idea starts with client service. Cutting down on bureaucracy helped the firm drive their rates lower, which reduced the pressure to bill clients for every interaction. That, in turn, incubated a more personal relationship with each client.

But Lopez sums it up even better, stating simply, "it’s important for [our clients] to feel respected, and not just like another invoice.”