



Four Areas of Your Law Firm to Take a Fresh Look at in 2020

The start of a new year is an ideal time for solo practitioners and small law firm attorneys to take stock of their law firms' operations over the last year and determine what they can do better in the year ahead.

Below are four areas of your law firm that deserve a fresh assessment in 2020. Taking a critical look at them should help you identify what's working and what's not at your firm—and what you may be able to improve on in the new year.

1. YOUR EXPENSES

The most important mathematical equation that all law firms need to know is also quite simple:

$$\text{Revenues} - \text{Expenses} = \text{Profit}$$

Most attorneys focus on intentionally increasing revenues. But in unprofitable law firms, the financial pain is likely caused by an unintentional and uncontrolled increase in expenses.

In 2020, plan to take a closer look at your expenses.

There will be easy questions, such as whether you need to continue subscribing to all of the publications you're currently paying for, and whether you need to always buy dinner for prospective referral sources when conversations over coffee would suffice.

These questions may also include whether you need to continue leasing your current office space (and dealing with taxes, electric bills and the like), or whether you can move your practice to a [coworking space](#) or, for solos, a home office.

Then, there will be the tough questions, such as whether your firm really needs a full-time receptionist, paralegals and even attorneys, or whether you can outsource their tasks to a [virtual receptionist](#), virtual paralegals and contract attorneys.

2. YOUR MARKETING

If we're talking about law firm expenses, [marketing can't be too far behind](#).

When's the last time you looked closely at the money you are investing in your marketing, and what you are getting back?

If your firm spends \$10,000 a month on marketing, and that marketing brings in \$20,000 worth of new business each month, you should not only continue that marketing program, but consider increasing the spend.

However, if you are investing \$10,000 a month on marketing and getting \$2,500 worth of new business each month because of it, you should consider making a change.

Of course, marketing isn't just about what you are spending. A large part of marketing is what you say and who you are saying it to.

Are you targeting a specific kind of prospective client for your firm? If so, have you taken a look recently to see if your marketing is actually speaking to these would-be clients about the legal issues you can help them with? If not, why not? Have you given any thought to whether the clients you wish to target today are different from the ones you targeted last year or the year before? If so, is your marketing messaging keeping pace?

3. YOUR CLIENT EXPERIENCE

What do your clients see, hear and feel when they interact with your firm?

Do they see a law firm that [promptly responds to their calls and emails](#)?

Do they hear from you and your colleagues an [empathetic approach](#) to their legal problems and the overall practice of law?

Do your clients feel like your law firm emphasizes client value?

Clients who do not see, hear or feel these things are unlikely to provide your law firm with glowing online reviews and testimonials. Nor are they likely to refer business to the firm. This will prevent your firm from growing to its full potential.

There are only two ways to determine what your clients see, hear and feel during their time working with your firm.

One is to get feedback from your clients, either by proactively asking them or by reactively checking [your firm's online reviews](#).

The other way is to use a "mystery shopper" program where either you (under an assumed name) or another person contacts your firm as a prospective client and records their interactions with your colleagues until the point of actually retaining your firm to provide legal services. At that point, the mystery shopper would provide you and your colleagues with his or her observations and suggestions for improvements.

Either way, you won't be able to improve your firm's client experience until you know what that experience currently is.



4. YOUR WORKPLACE CULTURE

Do your colleagues enjoy working with you? Do you even know?

It's hard for a business of any kind to fire on all cylinders when its people are unhappy and unenthusiastic. This is especially true inside a professional services firm where the firm's employees are on the front lines interacting with clients.

Take the collective temperature of your colleagues. What do they like most about working for you? What do they dislike the most? What do they wish you and your firm did more of? What do they wish you'd stop doing? To get the most honest feedback, you may want to consider creating a system that allows for anonymous feedback.



Once you have this feedback in hand, it is time to develop a plan for building on your strengths and addressing any shortcomings.

Some perceived shortcomings, like claims of being paid below-market salaries, will require a financial investment in order to improve. Other perceived shortcomings, such as a lack of communication, a lack of a vision or mission or a lack of clear goals, can be improved with an investment of time and inspiration.

THE BENEFIT OF A FRESH SET OF EYES

Every December and January, law firms of all sizes are often told that they need to take on bold challenges or invest in new products or services in the coming year if they hope to grow.

But sometimes the quickest way for attorneys to build bigger and better law firms is much less alluring: taking stock of certain areas within their law firms and determining the little things they can do to improve those areas and unlock their firms' potential for growth.

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