

Ernie Svenson: Hey everyone, I want to welcome you to this first episode of *Law Firm Autopilot*. This is a podcast for lawyers who want to find a better way of practicing law. This podcast is specifically focused on solo lawyers or ones who practice in small law firms. I believe that small firm lawyers have the greatest opportunities to have a filling practices, much more so than folks who work in large firms. I say this from personal experience having worked first in a large New Orleans firm for over 18 years and then as a solo lawyer for over eight year's.

My practice involved commercial litigation, which involves lots of paper and lots of boxes. At the large firm I was fortunate to have great help in managing those boxes or paper, because the firm had top notch paralegals who kept everything organized without any direction for me, that was great. There were a lot of things I found enjoyable at the start of my practice at the big firm, but over the years I got disillusioned, burned out, there was bureaucracy that was rampant, there was high billable hour quotas and mostly it was the bureaucracy that even making a simple decision requires some kind of committee. So, all that made me very burned out disillusioned and generally unsatisfied with my practice.

Even though I'd become a full partner, which was the ultimate brass ring I was striving for, I basically hated working at the firm. So, I wasn't happy and I was looking for a way to get out. My escape route, turned out to be through technology. In 2002, I started a web blog called, Ernie The Attorney and I did this mostly as an experiment. I kept it up and it turned out to be something that was quite useful. In fact, I would actually say it was a major breakthrough.

What happened was, I just kept writing blog post and the more I did this, the more I learned about online marketing and the best way to do it. I got a lot of attention from an directions basically having that website, the Ernie The Attorney blog, was directly responsible for me being able to start my seller practice in 2006. Eventually I created another website called paperless chase, which was focused on how to create a paperless law practice and I did this because being paperless was crucial for myself practice.

I couldn't afford to have expensive staff to help me manage lots of boxes of paper, which was how things worked at the old firm. Setting up a website to explain how I managed to be paperless was something that was helpful right for me, but it was also helpful for other lawyers those websites The Ernie the attorney website and the paperless chase website helped me attract other attorneys and talk to them about how they can improve their practices by using technology.

Now recently I created a new website called law firm autopilot, which is more broadly focused on all aspects of leveraging technology to improve your law practice and I chose that name for this podcast for that reason. As I was saying, this podcast is focused on solo and small firm attorneys, because as I said those the kind of attorneys that have the greatest opportunities to have a filling practices and that was true when I left the world a big law to go solo and it's still true today.

Now, the kind of cases that I worked on when I shifted from big firm to solo didn't really change that much right I kept doing the same kinds of things and I was able to do this because of technology, but most importantly I was much happier as a solo

lawyer. Why is this? Well, because I had more control over how I practice law, about what kind of clients I accepted, what kind of cases I chose to work on and this is not really unique to me, because there are scientific studies that show that people who have control over their work are much happier and I can confirm that that scientific study for those studies are accurate.

Now, I'm not going to lie and say everything was rosy, obviously there were lots of challenges and running a small law firm and since the firm is smaller, there are less people to address those challenges and in a solo firm there's only one you. The other disadvantage of a small firm is that the resources are more limited, but there are many things that we regard as challenging, that are actually insignificant in the broader scheme of things, let's just break it down and keep it simple, because it's basically a two part thing.

For small law firms there are really two significant challenges, one is getting steady work from great clients, that's the key to financial success and financial security. Then number two, you have to have operational efficiency so that things run smoothly and that you can service those clients at a high level and keep them happy. And you want to do this in a way that avoids frustration to you that can come from this organization inefficiency or just things blowing up, so you want your practice to be as easy to manage as possible.

Now, fine tuning things that both of these things happen takes time. Requires thoughtfulness and strategic thinking. The technology plays an important role and making your law firm run efficiently and cost effectively, but it should also play an important role in helping you get steady work of the kind that you most enjoy doing. But the thing is, you have to use technologies sensibly and strategically if you want to get solid results, otherwise, you just create more chaos and frustration.

This podcast is going to be about how you can develop a sensible strategy and then execute on that strategy so that you leverage technology in the right way and make your practice exponentially more profitable and easier to manage. A few important words about technology, science fiction writer Arthur Clarke is known for this pithy quote, which is any sufficiently advanced technology, is indistinguishable from magic.

Now, he said that in the 1960s, but it's even more true today. Technologies all over the place, we're replete with advanced technology and most of it seems truly magical but appearances are deceiving. Once you understand how a magic trick works you realize there's no magic it's just an illusion and there's a process behind making the illusion work.

Now, creating the illusion magic requires complex stagecraft and subtle in this directions and modern technology is a lot like that too. Technology can see magical but that's just an illusion, more often for lawyers technology is frustrating. Now, why have lawyers started so hard to harness the magic of technology? Well, that's an important thing that this podcast will address. If you struggle to get benefits from technology and your law practice than this podcast is for you.

In the episodes that will follow I'll show you how to use technology to get incredible even magical results that will transform your practice making it easier to manage, less expensive to operate and vastly more profitable. Now, you don't need to understand the intricacies of technology, in fact, you don't need much in the way of tech skills. In other words, you don't have to be a skilled magician, you just have to know how the tricks work.

Of course, you will have to deal with technology to some extent, you can't completely ignore technology or dismiss its importance. You need to be realistic about the role of technology in modern life and especially as it relates to the business of practicing law. Technology is integral to the operation any modern law firm, you need to do more than just be aware of technology and plug it in here and there in order to a successful practice, you do need to use technology, to have a successful practice, but you can't run a successful law firm without it.

Now, if you don't learn to properly harness technology your practice will become difficult and burdensome. There are many reasons why you should learn to properly manage technology and we alluded to these, first, it can make your practice easier to manage, it'll lower overhead, it'll streamline cumbersome base paper based workflows. Second, it can help you get study word from great clients, which creates financial stability and peace of mind and third, it will enable more efficient ways of collaborating with staff fellow lawyers, clients and outside consultants.

Now, many years ago advanced technology wasn't a realistic option for solo and small firm lawyers, but now they're probably in the best position to quickly capture the gains from technology, but so small firm lawyers can't afford to waste time or money so they have to be very strategic and very sensible about using technology. That means you have to be realistic about technology to reap its benefits because technology is inherently complicated, and even though we've seen great strides in making it user friendly, it's still incredibly complicated.

Now, in the beginning when technology first invaded the legal profession, lawyers were caught flat footed and some of us dismiss the significance of technology, many of us fail to see how quickly would proliferate and most of us couldn't imagine it would so quickly become an integral part of the legal profession. But it's clear now the technology is taken root and that it's insinuating itself ever deeper into our profession and while it's understandable that many of us were caught off guard. There's no longer any excuse for dismissing technology and in quite the opposite.

We need to better understand the role that technology can and should play in our practices and yes we too often find yourself struggling with technology and we need to ask ourselves, well, why are we struggling. And the main reason is something fundamental, it's something that has nothing really to do with technology or the skills required to use it or the skills in using it at whatever level you are. The main problem is that most lawyers don't have a clear blueprint of what it takes to create a successful practice, much less where technology where would fit into that blueprint. At this point, you would logically ask what is that blueprint? Well, that's what we're going to talk about in the next episode. So, I'll see you then, take care.