



## BEHIND THE SCENES AT A ONE-ON-ONE

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Each year at the Solo & Small Firm Section Conference I have a limited number of 15-minute slots available for members to book a one-on-one meeting with me. For many, it's the first time they'll meet me in person. Some slots are taken by regulars. Most of those in attendance miss out, a large number of whom are unaware of what the sessions are for.

I am frequently asked what gets talked about behind the door. All discussions are confidential. Skeptics always ask how much can actually be accomplished in just 15 minutes. Often their tone of voice conveys that they have complex issues to wrestle. I thought this newsletter would be a good opportunity to pull back the curtain to reveal the wizard, with all the switches and levers.

It's surprising how much can be accomplished in just 15 minutes. Regulars come in with a scrap of paper with questions noted. They are prepared to get immediately to the point to get the answers they need. They are rarely disappointed. Sometimes I must follow-up by sending additional resources when I get back to the office. Occasionally, a follow-up call is scheduled to finish a discussion in more depth, often after the attorney has had time to gather some additional information I need on the subject at hand or to include someone else at the firm on the call to build consensus.

Oftentimes an attorney meets with me for simple validation. Tears of despair or frustration sometimes fall on the table. Like a good psychiatrist, I am usually able to make sense of conflicting emotions, validate fears and anger, and most importantly, illuminate a path which has been previously unseen.

Not all problems have easy solutions. Sad but true. The process of validation may morph into a discussion about how much more one is willing to put up with before a change of venue is made; whether that is a possibility emotionally, financially, and given personal obligations. I frequently begin sentences with, "Life is too short to have to continue to put up with . . . ." And sometimes it's just a simple matter of letting someone know it's ok to say NO.

The most frequent topic always concerns declining revenues and/or profits, and how to generate additional work. Frequently this is intertwined with having too much work and too few hours to work on client development.

I wish I had a dime for every time someone asks what single activity will have the greatest impact, i.e., return, on time investment. Everyone is hoping that I will be able to provide an answer that involves delegating the work 100% to someone other than the attorney. Unfortunately, it rarely works like that. For the few areas of practice where it's possible, the attorney prefaces the conversation by saying they don't have the finances to compete at that level. That assessment is usually correct, unless the attorney is able to divert a fair amount of otherwise billable time or family time to marketing activities.

Probably the most frequent advice concerns how to maximize use of the time available. I often talk about how client development requires thought and research, developing strategies, writing down goals and action steps, and then blocking time on the calendar for all of it. In just under four decades serving the legal industry, I can assure you that a lack of good ideas is rarely the problem. It's breaking down ideas into a written action plan with specific goals, objectives, and action steps, and then setting aside the time on the calendar to get it accomplished.

Those of you who read this article are not only members of PBA but constitute the majority of attorneys in the state. You have unique challenges in a solo or small firm environment. Remember, if they are on the business side of your practice, I am here to help! You'll be surprised what we can accomplish in a relatively short period of time.

*A version of this article originally appeared in the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Fall 2019 issue of the Solo & Small Firm Section Newsletter..*

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