



PRACTICE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY SERVICE

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From the Desks of Your D.C. Bar Practice Management Advisors



Busy and Broke? Your Billing Problem May Actually Be a Marketing Problem

By Kaitlin E. McGee

We talk to a lot of lawyers who think they have a billing problem. Their clients don't pay on time, fight over invoices, expect more work than they agreed to pay for, and take up far too much time and energy.

Sometimes that is a billing problem. More often, it's a marketing problem.

If you don't have enough good prospective clients coming in, it gets very hard to say no to the wrong ones. You take a case because you need the work. You overlook red flags because the calendar is light. You tell yourself you can make this one work. That is how lawyers end up with problem clients.

Problem clients are expensive. They don't pay. They want something for nothing. They create stress that drains your energy for the clients you actually want. They take up space in your

practice that should be reserved for better work. That's how lawyers end up busy and broke.

The fix is not just "screen better." The real fix is to build a practice that attracts better clients in the first place. That means investing time in quality marketing and in relationships with referral sources who send you good matters. It means getting clear about the problem you solve, who you help, and what makes you a good fit. Good clients need to be able to find you. Good referral sources need to know what to send your way.

When you have enough good prospective clients coming in, saying no gets much easier.

That's where the consultation matters. I think of an initial consultation a little like a first date. The person sitting across from you is usually presenting the best version of themselves. They are trying to make a good impression. If you see red flags then, do not assume it will get better once the fee agreement is signed. It usually doesn't.

If a prospective client is rude to your staff, angry at every lawyer they've ever hired, cagey about the facts, resistant to talking about fees, or already pushing your boundaries in the first meeting, pay attention. Those aren't minor issues. They are previews. That behavior is likely to keep resurfacing throughout the representation.

The more good clients you see, the easier this gets. You know what a good client looks like. You know what a productive consultation feels like. And the bad clients start to stand out as an obvious "no."

You have to trust that the phone will ring again. Someone else will come along. Saying no to the wrong client is not turning away business. It's making room for the right one.

PMAS provides free, confidential consultations to D.C. Bar members. To learn more, contact pmas@dcbar.org

Basic Training & Beyond

If you're starting a firm, [Basic Training & Beyond](#) is a great jumping-off point. Day One will teach you the essentials to get your firm off the ground, and Day Two will help you grow and manage your firm.

Here is how to start, grow, and manage a law firm in a large, urban market.

Our monthly [Basic Training & Beyond](#) is set for **July 7 & 9, 2026, from 9:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.** We will meet in person in the Williamson Conference Room on the third floor of Bar Headquarters. The program is presented monthly for members and law firm staff.

This program has been presented more than four hundred times for more than 5,000 lawyers over the last seventeen years, and many have launched and are now operating small firms. We stay connected with many small firms, and what we learn informs the content for this program.

Managing Money

[Managing Money](#)

Our next in-person session on Managing Money is **September 9, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

We also present Managing Money on request for a law firm or organization.

[Register for an upcoming session or schedule a session for your firm here.](#)



Practice 360°

[Practice 360° Returns October 7, 2026](#)

This year's theme is **Thriving in Difficulty**.

Lawyers are navigating economic pressure, shifting client expectations, new technology, marketing disruption, and ongoing uncertainty. Yet many are still finding ways to grow and move forward.

Practice 360° will focus on what is helping them do it.

Expect practical sessions on the habits, strategies, systems, and decisions that help lawyers succeed during challenging times.

Featured presenters include:

- **Michelle Cotter Richards**, opening the program at 9:00 a.m.
- **Conrad Saam**, presenting 4 Agentic AI Agents Your Marketing Needs

- A program with the **D.C. Bar Lawyer Assistance Program**
- An afternoon **CLE with the D.C. Bar Legal Ethics team**

Additional sessions and speakers will be announced as the program develops.

Successful Small Firm Course

Are you interested in a business incubator approach to growing your law firm?

Consider working with us on an individual basis. We offer the **Successful Small Firm Practice Course** in a series of one-on-one sessions on Zoom.

The Course serves as an incubator for solo attorneys and small firms and helps them work through their business and marketing plans with support, feedback, and guidance. Lawyers focus on the type of firm they want to create and work through the Course at their own pace with built-in accountability for achieving their business goals. If you are interested in this approach to creating and growing a law firm, contact PMAS@dcbar.org.

Resources

Missed any of these recent sessions? You can [access the recordings and materials anytime](#).

Here's a glimpse of some recent sessions:

- **Lunch and Learn: Legal Design for Small & Medium Firms - Clarity, Compliance & Client Trust**
- **Recruiting and Hiring 101| Where to Start When You Are Ready to Grow Your Firm**
- **Can a Newsletter Really Help Grow My Law Firm?**
- **Can Your Fee Agreement Get You in Trouble?**

If you are interested in a practice management assessment, [click here](#).

– Kaitlin & Dan

In other news . . .

[Legal Ethics Opinion 392](#), Relationship Between Rules 3.3(d) and 1.6(d) in Civil Matters

For more information on the D.C. Bar Practice Management Advisory Service (PMAS), [click here](#).

CLE, Communities Events & Pro Bono:

Continuing Legal Education programs are [here](#).

Communities Events are [here](#).

Pro Bono Center training programs are scheduled [here](#).

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Practice Management Advisors have a free and confidential relationship with D.C. Bar members pursuant to Rule 1.6(j) of the D.C. Rules of Professional Conduct.



This two-volume title, typically priced at \$495, is being offered to subscribers of this newsletter at a discounted rate of \$450. To obtain the discount code, please reach out to communitiesregistration@dcbar.org.



[Practice 360°](#) | [Courses and Trainings](#) | [Mentoring Resource](#)