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Don't Make the Same Mistakes: What Makes a Great Law Firm in 2021?

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As an attorney or managing partner, you know what's needed to practice law – that much is undeniable. However, law firm management is much more than just showing up to court. It's about staying profitable and keeping [legal operations](#) efficient and within the confines of your practicing areas of law. How do you ensure client satisfaction while also maintaining proper recordkeeping? How do you overcome some of the biggest challenges around timing and tasks that aren't bringing in profit? Covering your tasks well so you can focus on profitability versus tedious admin to-dos is key to improving your day-to-day law firm management. It'll also keep your staff happy and feeling motivated toward a common goal.

In this blog, we'll cover the best ways to improve your law firm management – so you can boost profitability and make the most of your [operations](#).

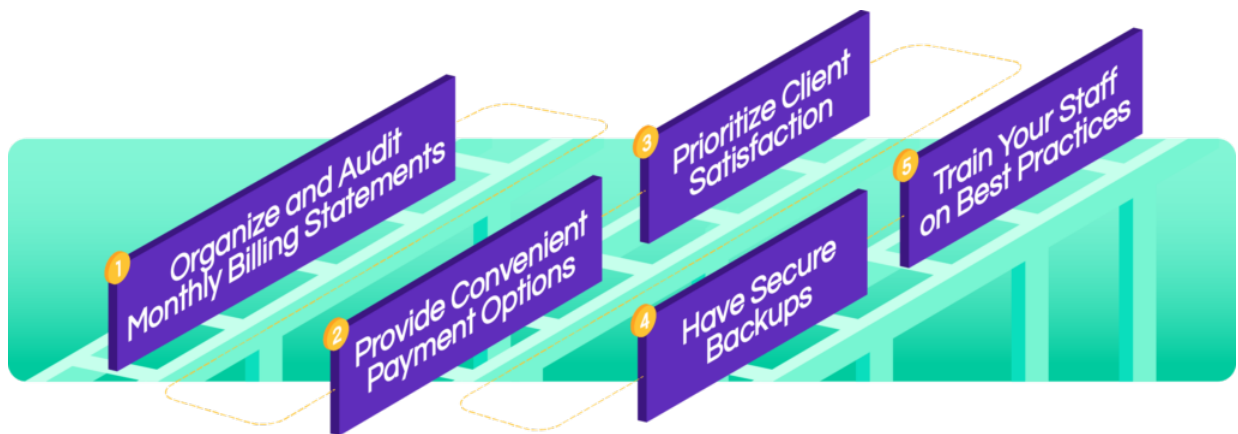
What Makes a Good Law Firm?

The short answer is finding the sweet spot between profitability and quality of client cases. A great law firm can deliver results and resolve cases in a clear, concise, and equitable manner. That said, a good firm also needs a well-structured, organized system that acts as an ecosystem, working together to solve cases. In 2021, you don't get that without law firm management that's driven by communication and constant vigilance and upkeep. With how fast things are changing digitally, and how competitive legal services have become, you can't afford to be complacent. A great law firm must adapt to the changing times, and be willing to constantly improve procedures and processes.

How to Manage a Law Firm

Depending on the size of your firm, there are basic building blocks you'll need to have in order to start creating these processes. Always work from the top to bottom, with high-level essentials that

will be easier to implement and more impactful in the long term.



Organize and Audit Monthly Billing Statements

Having visibility into your funds between accounts and trust funds is a necessity for proper management in your law firm. This happens with proper scheduling and a practice management system that [doesn't follow a "lite," or freemium trap](#) that nickel and dimes you for every additional [feature](#). The ability to run reports regularly, and with customization options, provide agility and insight when you need it most.

Provide Convenient Payment Options

No one wants to write checks anymore or wait the processing period in the bank for the funds to clear. Offering ways to pay instantly such as credit cards through a [secure practice management system](#) means you get paid faster, and easier.

Prioritize Client Satisfaction

Making sure clients feel heard is a big part of dealing with legal cases. This is a collective effort that must be followed by your entire staff, in a systematic and human way. Most people are distressed and uncertain during a legal matter, so practice compassion and be prepared to explain the steps of the case at any point. For larger firms, hiring someone whose sole job is focusing on clients can be a surefire way to keep them heard and informed.

What are the Law Firm Procedures and Hierarchy?

Part of law firm management is knowing what duties are attributed to what department. While these lines can certainly blur in a smaller firm, having a handbook that details these can help be a point of reference in the event things become problematic or missed. It also ensures alignment between everyone, as a collaborative environment is essential.

The below hierarchy gives you a structure for staying organized – but additionally, you’ll want to have procedures that are attributed to each role. Creating an accountability chart will help you delegate appropriately will save you headaches and issues with “too many cooks” later.

Legal Services

- **Managing Partner:** One of the most important things you can do as a partner is to know the financials of your firm, so you have a baseline on how to improve performance and make big picture decisions. You’ll be able to ascertain profit and loss, productivity, and other important KPIs that may need to be adjusted.
- **Legal Assistants/Paralegals:** From scheduling trials to meeting other court deadlines, these employees schedule trials, file paperwork, and meet all deadlines needed for cases (litigation and otherwise).
- **Attorneys:** One step down from the big picture, your attorneys have input on firm operations but also are the conduit between clients and opposing counsel. They go to court, sit with clients during depositions and other meetings, and are the main authority figure for assistants and other support staff.

Accounting and Finance

- **Accountant:** Your billing specialists ensure everything gets paid, and the lights stay on. Whether it’s a single accountant or an entire team, the more efficient your billing cycle and [pricing](#), the more visibility you’ll have into the health of your firm’s financials at any given time. For smaller firms, rather than shelling out money for a full-time employee, look into a contractor or outsourced bookkeeper to track financials until you’re larger and have the budget.

Marketing

- **Marketers:** Whether you function as a marketer in the beginning or hire a freelancer, investing

in being seen always pays off. Finding that desired potential clientele and attracting new audiences to your firm is useful as you grow. Having a brand that sets you apart can be critical when people are looking for legal services.

Law Firm File Management

Equally important to your human management is how you store files and client matters. To drive efficient law firm management, utilizing software that has easy data retrieval and organization can save many headaches down the line. While it's still almost impossible to go completely paperless, there are many digital tools that ease the paper load considerably. Some tips and tricks that you can look out to improve are:

Mobile App

Most law firm management software includes a secure mobile app that clients can access information regarding their case. They're also able to view invoices and pay any outstanding bills – making it an agile asset in your toolkit. Even better, your attorneys can actively track time on the go so all billable hours are accounted for.

Secure Backups

Cloud-based software keeps your information secure and tiered based on staff permissions assigned. The worst thing that could happen with on-premise hardware – which was largely the standard up until recent years – is losing mission-critical information and documents attributed to a client's case. As you know, all the digital notes and scanned paperwork must be kept available for a certain amount of time after a case is resolved. Don't take the risk; have a system that runs daily backups so no power surge or natural disaster puts you in a bind.

Train Staff on File Best Practices

If you're in the neighborhood for law firm software, having an ambassador who can work with you to use it to its fullest potential will be a big boon moving forward with matters. Having a go-to expert for software, while being able to train everyone else, ensures procedures are followed and there'll never be any ambiguity when it comes to filing retrieval or recordkeeping. Standardizing simplifies, and saves time, even if it takes a while to adopt across your firm.

Law Firm Time Management

Some of the above-summarized methods to save time, but there are more ways to build on these solutions to help your staff feel more empowered and give minutes and hours back in their day.

Track Billable Time

A mobile app or software like mentioned previously that can automatically track the length of time for certain entries and matter tasks. This will let you know what cases are most profitable for you, so you can make the big picture decisions on which ones you should prioritize. More than not, a more quality case versus taking lots of smaller ones can be more profitable – and easier on your staff.

See how Centerbase can speed up your billing cycle by 30% every month

Prioritize and Collaborate

A team works best and saves time if they're aligned and communicating on what the biggest priorities are. While billing needs to get done at a certain time, perhaps a legal assistant can help with filing or report retrieval so one of your accountants can focus on getting invoices out on time. Having a team that works closely together will improve management and drive the efficiency of your operations.

Here are 5 Ways to Improve Your Law Firm Management

There are a few things you can examine to manage a firm that's more successful overall:

1. **Have a vision:** This may not seem obvious, but without a common goal and mission, you and your staff may feel unclear on what their ultimate objectives are. Sure, it's usually "complete the case, get the settlement," but many employees want a leader whose goals can help boost their goals as your firm expands – and that loyalty will help your firm's reputation and efficiency excel in the long run.
2. **Know your firm's baseline:** You don't know what you don't know. Establishing regular reporting on the past year, quarter, or month (or all of the above) to see where you may have the biggest delays in payments can be a valuable tool in knowing where to improve performance and

incoming revenue.

3. **Use digital marketing tools:** Many smaller firms may rely on word of mouth and referrals to continue the business, but that's simply not sustainable on its own anymore. This is especially true since there are so many channels you can advertise through social media and sponsored content. Be sure to take inventory of your clientele and invest in a website and social media strategy that brings you in front of new people for ongoing traffic and cases.
4. **Listen to your staff:** You probably aren't in the day-to-day operations of your firm – but your staff is. Foster an open door policy and meetings that encourage feedback and ways to improve directly from them. After all, you hired them as experts. Billing specialists will have considerable more insight into what may be a bottleneck than you, even from reporting access. You'll find management will be a much smoother and agreeable process when the staff feels like you're on their side to help them do their jobs.
5. **Give accolades:** Everyone likes feeling appreciated! Most firms are high volume, high-pressure environments, so show them you notice and credit their performance – especially if it's above and beyond. Without proper acknowledgment, many employees and attorneys will leave and go elsewhere that has a better culture and environment. Law firm management is about just that; managing people, as they are your most prized asset, and should be treated well.

We hope this was a helpful resource for you to reference as you continue to explore law firm management. It's never a "one and done" duty, and iterative improvements will always need to be made over time. If you're looking for a way to instantly help streamline processes and payments, consider looking into practice management software that simplifies day-to-day processes and helps keep everyone aligned.

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