

The PMRC Experience

On the front lines with a solo practitioner

“I have to apologize,” David Schoolcraft told a visitor to the two-story house in Webberville out of which he runs his legal practice on a steamy summer afternoon. “The air conditioning went out today.”

Being a solo practitioner means that some days you’re an attorney and others you’re a human resources specialist, custodian, or, in this particular instance, building manager. Schoolcraft found someone to come out to his office in the farming community of 1,500 residents about a half-hour east of Lansing to fix the busted unit the next day. And as enticing as life as your own boss might be—Schoolcraft cites professional and personal fulfillment and the chance to make an impact on people’s lives among the reasons he chose to go it alone—the more time spent, say, shoveling snow off the sidewalks means less billable time behind the desk.

So when Schoolcraft heard the State Bar of Michigan’s Practice Management Resource Center (PMRC) had invited attorney and legal technologist Barron Henley to Lansing to conduct a seminar on streamlining law office operations, he quickly signed up.

“That guy is good,” Schoolcraft said of Henley, who he first heard at an event he attended a couple years ago. “He knows what he’s talking about. He’s got great suggestions. His program is worthwhile. I’ll go listen to him speak every time he talks.”

That the presentation attracted Schoolcraft is no surprise, because Henley’s strategies are invaluable to solo practitioners and



Attendees at a June seminar hosted by the State Bar of Michigan Practice Management Resource Center listen intently to a presentation by attorney and legal technologist Barron Henley.

smaller law offices operating on budgets that sometimes jingle more than they crinkle. It’s also no shock that Henley was part of the first seminar the PMRC hosted at its Lansing base of operations. Although law firms of any size are encouraged to use it, the PMRC is geared toward helping members who don’t have the necessary resources, be it time or financial, to devote to running an office at maximum efficiency.

“The small guy has different concerns about running an office than the big guys,” said Schoolcraft, who spent 14 years in the

legal department of a multinational insurance company with a half-dozen attorneys and a handful of support staffers before going solo in 2005. “We have to do more of our legwork.”

That’s where the PMRC comes in. Whether it’s information provided by its full-time staff or via seminars from experts such as Henley, helping attorneys wade through the myriad of products and services associated with office management is its primary goal.

“For example, I don’t have time to research all of the practice management software,” Schoolcraft said. “There are dozens [of programs] out there, but I didn’t know but two or three. But I realize the cost benefits to this law office—or to any other law office—of having practice management software in place.”

Had he not attended the seminar, Schoolcraft says he likely would’ve purchased the

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latest version of a popular practice management package—one that, according to Henley, still had a number of bugs that needed to be worked out.

“There’s no way I would’ve known until I would’ve had [the company] come out and begin the installation process,” Schoolcraft explains. “By then, it’s almost too late. I don’t have time to have them come out, install it, and then find out there’s something wrong with it and have them uninstall it and take it back. Anything that helps us save time and narrow the choices without actually trying to make the final decision for us. It’s a delicate balance.”

Based on his first experience, Schoolcraft says he and his assistant, who attended Henley’s briefing on shortcuts for using Microsoft Word, will definitely take part in upcoming PMRC events. He’d like to see more programs geared toward the needs of SBM members like him—solo practitioners and attorneys from smaller law offices lacking the time and/or finances to exhaustively research office management solutions—along with updates on the latest software enhancements and ways to integrate new technology into his existing framework.

“Solo practice is so different and stressful and wonderful all at the same time,” Schoolcraft said. “I’m really glad that the State Bar is trying to help out the little guys. We’re on the front lines. We’re the ones who are dealing with people issues every day. We’re the ones who are going to make a difference in how this profession is thought of by the public and to do that, we’ve got to offer excellent service.” ◆

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