

BRINGING YOUR A GAME

Working on practice management basics gives you a solid platform to provide legal services.

Knowledge of the law is fundamental, but not the only ingredient when providing high quality legal services to your clients. LPLC sees claims against practitioners who know the law, but for a variety of reasons fail to discharge their duty of care to the client. Solid practice management basics help you get the package right, discharge your duty to the client and avoid problems. The required practice management basics consist of a few simple steps.

Define areas of work

The practice of law is complex and constantly changing. Lawyers are not expected to know all the law in all areas of practice, but they are expected to know the law in areas in which they take instructions. Defining your work areas gives you boundaries and specific areas of practice to focus on. The more areas of work you take on, the more law you must learn and keep up to date with. Define and narrow your practice and learn the law required to do that work well.

Dabbling in work outside your knowledge and experience is high risk and avoiding or rejecting this work is basic risk management. With defined boundaries you have a pre-determined position to say no to work that is outside your areas of practice.

Develop the tools to do the job

Practitioners regularly tell LPLC they are time poor and struggling to keep up with the volume of work and tight time frames. Claims arise when practitioners miss a court date, send out the wrong version of a document or fail to register a document

after settlement. Every practitioner needs the tools and systems to gather the required information, identify issues, record critical dates, produce documents and communicate effectively with clients. Checklists, prompts, shared calendars, precedent letters and pro forma documents are basic tools for all legal work. Develop the basic tools into a workflow system to accurately and efficiently complete every matter you take on. A clear process from start to finish with prompts, checklists and reminders helps avoid basic mistakes but also helps you stand out as an efficient, high quality service provider.

Bring your A game

Even when you are doing work in your defined areas of practice with systems and tools in place to avoid mistakes, you still need to bring your A game to every job. Every matter for every client carries a duty of care and you must continuously work to high standards to avoid problems. You must be disciplined to do the required work at the required time and not cut corners or compromise your role as an independent professional adviser. All practitioners need to think about their personal performance. Be aware of times and things that affect your performance. We see claims when things in a practitioner's personal life or other external circumstances affect their work. It is important to invest time to look after yourself and learn how to say no if circumstances, often out of your control, prevent you from bringing your best to the task.

Allocate time and plan for success

Defining your areas of work intake, learning the law, building the tools to safely and efficiently produce your work and investing in yourself to bring your A game don't happen by themselves. As a professional there is more to your role than just doing client work. You need to plan for success by recognising the importance of practice management basics, allocate time to work on them and be disciplined in your implementation and application.

Providing your legal services on a solid foundation of practice management basics will give you the best opportunity to efficiently deliver high quality legal services that clients value.

Are you allocating enough time to yourself and your practice management basics? ■

This column is provided by the **Legal Practitioners' Liability Committee**. For further information ph 9672 3800 or visit www.lplc.com.au.

TIPS

- Knowledge of the law is only one component of being a good lawyer.
- Practice management basics are an important part of practising as a lawyer.
- Define the areas of law you will do and don't dabble.
- Develop tools and systems to do the work in your area such as checklists, prompts, shared calendars, precedents and workflows.
- Don't cut corners, and bring your A game to work every day.
- Allocate time to work on your practice management and legal files.

