



Success often comes at a price

Some of the firms we have visited as part of our Risk Assistance Program have been around for 20 to 30 years. They often have a sole principal and have grown over the years to have five to eight lawyers and multiple support and administrative staff. The principal works long hours and spends a large proportion of their time doing client legal work as well as trying to manage the firm and bring in new clients.

While the firms' growth is an indication of success, it is not surprising that some of these firms end up having a string of claims. The principal and the legal staff are all competent lawyers but growth of the firm and the focus on doing legal work has meant there are not enough systems, processes and structures in place to support the size of the firm and the volume of work they are doing.

If you find yourself heading in this direction there are some things to think about.

What is your strategy? Have you clearly defined what work you will and won't do, documented and shared it so everyone in the firm knows what it is?

Does everyone have a job description? It might sound obvious but clearly defining what is expected of everyone is important for a well-run organisation.

Do you have clearly written policies, procedures and processes? It might seem like it takes too much time to develop these, but it saves time, and possibly a claim, in the long run. It was alright to operate on everyone 'just knowing' what to do when there was only three of you in the office, but as the office grows it is important to formalise what is expected and how to do it for everyone's benefit. See LPLC's [list of policies](#) for what other firms use.

Do you have an electronic practice management system? As the firm grows there should be a single place where files are managed.

This helps develop good systems and processes and allows for management oversight as most systems provide a range of reports to keep track of financial and risk issues. It is important that everyone uses the system consistently which means you need regular training and review. There are a range of systems available now for law firms that will suit a range of practice and budgetary needs. See a [comparison of practice management systems](#) on Next Legal's website.

Do you supervise and train your staff? Supervision is not simply an 'open door'. As you put on more staff you need to invest more time in supervising, training and reviewing work, rather than producing it yourself. Hiring more staff is not a 'set and forget' solution. See LPLC's [Tips for effective supervision](#) and [Delegation/supervision instruction sheet](#).

As your firm grows your role changes from lawyer to leader and manager. The larger the firm the more time you need to spend on leading the firm and its people and managing how the firm works. Some of the management can be delegated and at a certain size you could consider employing an office manager, but the ultimate oversight still rests with you as the principal.

Don't be the victim of your own success, as your law firm grows stop to think about how you need to be doing things differently. In the words of Marshall Goldsmith: What got you here won't get you there.



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