

Review of Attorney and Law Firm Guide to The Business of Law -- Planning and Operating for Survival and Growth

Reviewed by Edward Olkovich. Reproduced by permission from the "Bookmarks" column of Law Practice Management magazine, Vol. 28:4, May/June 2002 issue.

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Do you dream of being Captain of your own law firm? Perhaps you are holding back because you lack practical skills to manage your own ship? Take heart. Edward Poll, respected columnist and management consultant, has written a comprehensive systems manual for you. This smoothly written second edition will benefit both novice and experienced lawyers.

Practicing law is like sailing a ship. You need to avoid danger and keep afloat. In good times you sail, in bad times you bail. If you control your practice, you will not capsize in stormy weather. You will be free to sail the clear blue, wherever you want.

Edward Poll is an authority you can quote on the planning, surviving and growing of law firms. He believes that lawyers require marketing, technical, and financial competencies. If you think he sounds like another law firm management guru gone bananas you are wrong. Edward Poll didn't live in the jungle but spent twenty-five years practicing law. Wait a minute. Maybe that is a jungle?

If you are inside a firm then sections on organizing work, technology, improving client relations, pricing legal services and staffing risks and responsibilities will warrant reading. If you want to be a captain, read this book. It has details on planning, opening, operating, growing, and moving a law office. Everything from stationery to movers and more is laid out step by step.

Poll's writing is sophisticated but not stuffy. He is direct. He tells you what your goals should be; get clients, provide quality work and get paid. His sensible voice has a motivational tone and comes with action steps and case studies. There are not a lot of personal stories. Poll does not describe the panic a lawyer feels when clients stop coming in or refuse to pay their bills. But he does have good ideas to prevent the problems. Like all captains his calmness is reassuring. You sense he has been there and can steer you away from dangerous rocky shores. He is a beacon you can trust to keep you from drifting.

Poll's approach to law office management shines like a lighthouse. His chapters reinforce themes that lawyers should be marketing all the time. He's dignified but sees connections between business and law as a profession. I like his gutsy style that says "Marketing begins from the moment you wake to the moment you go to sleep". For some that may be crass; to others it's obvious. For those struggling it is enlightenment.

Jargon-free remedies for everyday law firm problems are at your fingertips. It's clear and concise coverage of fundamentals in one text. Line by line analysis of a cash flow statement (the secret is making cash flow) is helpful. Once you have mastered it you will skip this section. But beware. Fiscal management is crucial. Failure can lead to disgrace and disbarment. Probably something they still don't teach you in law school. So get this book.

Here is another favorite: "Every moment spent not trying to find new work is a lost opportunity". You do not have to agree with his marketing approach to find this a best buy. Poll reviews advantages and disadvantages of many techniques and strategies. Counting the appendices included on a disk *The Business of Law* has 52 chapters. Plenty of nautical nuggets will surface from weekly reading.

What can be wrong with such a large volume of excellence?

This edition has credits for contributors with specialized knowledge. It makes the book more valuable as a reference but slightly uneven in parts. This doesn't lessen the book's enjoyment. In anything six hundred pages long you would have expected huge highs and lows. They never materialize and you will want to re-read it.

Is it missing anything? Perhaps, but what more do you need? Checklists and sample letters? Other books cover this. Be glad the client essentials - billing, bonding and branding - are well covered.

Can I make suggestions for improvement? Only one. Don't waste the back cover, which is blank. Fill it with testimonials so everyone will buy this book. How about "Everything needed to practice law successfully" or "How to sail your own ship". Aye Aye Captain.

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