



MY OPINION

BY JENNIFER EVANS MORRIS

PRESIDENT, TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

A Practical Resource for Young Lawyers

About a year ago, my sister, Gail Schroeter, freshly minted from Texas Tech University School of Law, called to ask me, her big sister, some legal questions. I confidently took the call knowing I could field any legal question she threw at me.

I was ... overconfident. “How much should I charge per hour for a family law case in Del Rio?” “Should I use an online fax service?” “What copy, fax, and scan machines should I buy — or should I buy one at all?” “Where can I obtain free or inexpensive CLE since I don’t live near a bar association?” “What is a good billing program?”

Like many other young lawyers in this economy, Gail faced a difficult decision: Hang out her own shingle where she and her husband would be living or find another profession. I thought she was either very crazy or very brave. We will go with brave! Regardless, I had to refer my sister to my husband, who had opened up his own firm and could actually answer some of these questions. But the experience made me question whether the Texas Young Lawyers Association can provide the resources young lawyers need most right now — practical tools.

It is hardly news that the last year or two have been difficult for young lawyers and law students. Promising associates unexpectedly found themselves packing up their offices in boxes with debt to pay, no plans, and no savings. Firms that typically hire by the dozens cancelled summer programs. Law students who had been promised jobs saw those jobs evaporate. And we all became familiar with a new job status: the deferred associate.



Although the layoffs have slowed down, and firms have started hiring again, the market is not what it once was. Young lawyers must reassess their strengths and priorities and focus on how they will define and obtain success. For some, this means finding alternative ways to use a law degree. For others, it means finding a new area of expertise. And for a growing number of young lawyers, it means hanging out your own shingle.

It was in this environment that I found myself preparing for the 2010-2011 bar year as TYLA president. We began looking at what CLE programming TYLA and the State Bar have to offer young lawyers who are considering changing their area of practice. We looked into how young lawyers are finding out about job opportunities across the state. And we reviewed what resources are available to young lawyers who are considering opening up their own practice.

Sarah Rogers, a TYLA director from Dallas, suggested that what we really needed was a resource for young lawyers that contained everything you need to know to open up your own office — information about business plans, how to obtain and keep clients, how to obtain and keep money, how to set up your office, and how to keep it running efficiently. Much of this infor-

mation is available through the State Bar’s Law Practice Management Program (www.texasbarcle.com/cle/LMHome.asp). I encourage you to visit that site. TYLA created a video several years ago, *Hangin’ Out Your Shingle: Things to Consider Before Starting Your Own Practice*, but much has changed in the practice of law and in legal technology since then. Sarah recognized an opportunity to really help young lawyers across the state through TYLA’s newest project, *Office in a Flash*, by compiling numerous resources you need to know to open up your own law practice — all on a flash drive.

Office in a Flash, available free by request at www.tyla.org, is a multimedia tool with video files, Word documents, checklists, and forms. *Office in a Flash* provides practical information about what your firm should look like and how it should be managed, how to set up your office (including answers to questions about space, tax issues, business cards, and furniture), what you need to know about technology (online faxing, free research, and email accounts), and how to receive and manage your revenue (including how to obtain a tax ID number and how to set compensation). *Office in a Flash* also includes helpful forms, such as invoices, engagement letters, intake sheets, bill collection letters, and case management sheets. And, thanks to TexasBarCLE, *Office in a Flash* includes one free hour of CLE.

We can’t make the market better, and we can’t promise you a job, but TYLA can provide practical resources to help you. *Office in a Flash* does just that. We hope you enjoy it. ★