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NLRG Client Obtains Favorable Settlement in Shipping Dispute:

An engineering company contracted with an Indiana carrier to ship sophisticated equipment from California to the shipper in Texas. The carrier's tariff provided that any claim for damage during shipment had to be filed within 9 months after delivery. When the equipment was damaged en route, the shipper notified the carrier, within 9 months, that it sought to be reimbursed for the damage, and that the carrier should open a claim if it had not already done so, but the shipper did not provide specific information about the amount of the damage. The carrier would not settle the matter, arguing that the shipper's claim was time-barred because it was not filed within 9 months with the specificity required by the tariff, Carmack Amendment regulations, and Fifth Circuit precedent. Relying on an argument prepared by attorney **Paul Ferrer** of NLRG, attorney **Steve Potts** of **Potts Law Group** responded that the Seventh Circuit, where the carrier is headquartered, has held that a specific dollar amount is not an absolute requirement; rather, it is enough if the carrier is given sufficient information to begin processing the claim. The carrier eventually agreed to settle the matter for the entire amount sought by the shipper: the full cost to repair the equipment.

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SOLO/SMALL FIRM

How to Grow YOUR LAW PRACTICE

A QUICK GUIDE TO
EXPONENTIAL EXPANSION.

WRITTEN BY MARTHA M. NEWMAN

Act as though you are running a business. You are!

Priority number one—create a business plan with yearly growth goals. Writing a detailed business plan with revenue targets and growth metrics as well as a strategic plan for implementing those goals is crucial to your firm's success.

Practicing law is a profession, but it is also a business. You risk crippling your success from the beginning if you ignore sound business practices. The more you plan with time-tabled benchmarks, the faster your firm will grow. Here are resources that will help you.

- The Lawyer's Guide to Creating a Business Plan, Sixth Edition americanbar.org/products/inv/cdr/137050908/
- Law Office Business Plan Worksheet <https://www.osbplf.org/assets/forms/pdfs/Law%20Office%20Business%20Plan%20Worksheet.pdf>
- The Lawyer's Guide to Strategic Planning <https://catalog.sll.texas.gov/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=8480>

Put aside your fears and delegate.

When you have lawyers and paralegals you can trust, insisting on handling a case in its entirety stems from perfectionism (*nobody can do this work as well as I can*), fear of loss of control, and often laziness about figuring out what to delegate. When you fail to delegate, it can cripple your productivity and prevent you from focusing on the high dollar work only you can do.

Leverage your people! On each new matter establish criteria for what work can be delegated to associates and paralegals and have the courage to hand over the work to them while maintaining a supervisory role. Your revenues will surge!

Hire new employees sooner than later.

Add new employees before you absolutely need them. As you gain new clients and your book grows, be proactive about staffing up to handle the heavier workloads before the work gets out of hand. Move with reasonable caution but have the courage to take growth-oriented risks. Using

personality assessments to gauge the business development skills of new hires and identify their rainmaking potential will help ensure continued growth. Outsource if advisable.

Strong cultures fuel firm growth.

Define your core values. Live them. Recruit lawyers who fit those values. Top people and quality clients will gravitate to your firm if it is known as a place where lawyers have strong relationships and trust each other.

A firm with no core values is siloed, disjointed, and cliquish. Partners selfishly guard clients from associates and project a "me-first" attitude.

According to Altman Weil author Eric Seeger, a healthy culture that fosters growth is interdependent, collaborative, coordinated, and trusting. Partners put the firm first and practice law with a shared agenda. Lawyers in those firms cross-sell, refer business to each other, share associates, and become more profitable because clients notice the difference between values-based firms and dysfunctional ones.

Use technology to automate repetitive tasks and reduce staff.

Lighten your load and save money by using technology-assisted support such as LegalTypist, virtual receptionists such as Ruby Receptionist or Abby Connect, virtual assistance like VAnetworking, and legal software such as Clio, MyCase, or Rocket Matter.

Drive growth these additional ways.

- Capture your billable time as you go. Don't lose money by trying to recreate it later.
- Work in focused work periods and reduce inter office interruptions to increase your billables.
- Create a marketing plan, back it up with a generous marketing budget, and devote 30% of your work week to business development.
- Get out of the office. Write. Speak. Network.
- Make your website client friendly and invest in strong search engine optimization.
- Keep in touch with former and current clients and cultivate referral sources.

What will make your success easier and faster to achieve? Discarding self-doubt and believing in yourself. **TBJ**



MARTHA M. NEWMAN

is a former oil and gas litigator and owner of Top Lawyer Coach. She specializes in lawyer coaching and consulting in the areas of law firm management, business development, leadership, time management, presentation skills, career advancement, and job interviewing. Newman has been awarded the Professional Certified Coach, or PCC, credential by the International Coach Federation in recognition of her coaching excellence. For more information, go to toplawyercoach.com.