

# the house rules

solo and  
home-office  
law practice

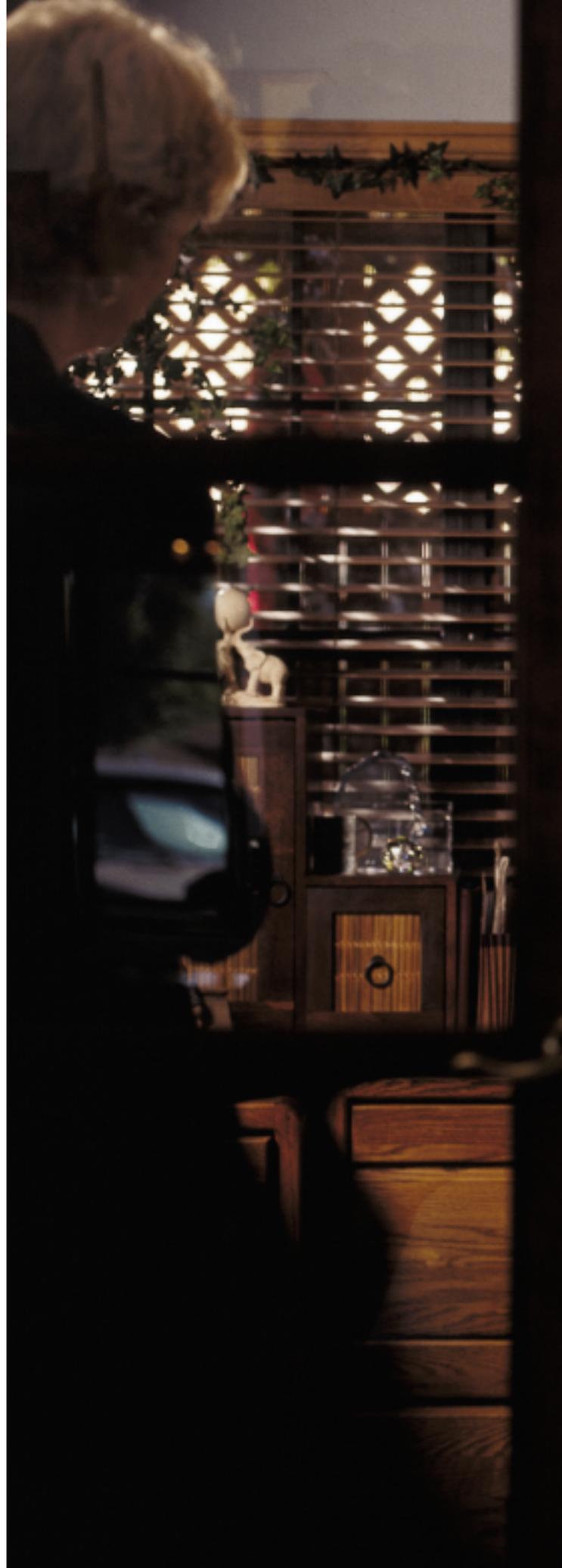
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PHOTOS BY MICHAEL MERTZ

As law firm mergers become more common, megafirms dot the landscape and often steal the show. But also worthwhile is a glimpse inside solo practices and home-office firms. This was the kind of practice that made up the early history of U.S. lawyers' lives. And statistics show that this is the kind of practice to which increasing numbers of attorneys turn today. Some facts:

- 47 percent of all attorneys in private practice are sole practitioners.
- 38 percent of all private practitioners less than 40 years old are solos.
- 53 percent of all private practitioners more than 40 years old are solos.

How do home-office practitioners do what they do? How do they develop contacts and a client base and do so from their own homes? Recently, eight extraordinarily busy lawyers met and discussed their work and the way their lives are enriched by their practice. As their words show, none would trade his or her practice for mainstream firm life.





**Diane Drain**  
consults at home.

**Roundtable discussion  
moderated by Arizona  
Attorney Editor Tim Eigo.**



**Tim Eigo:** Thank you all for coming to this *Arizona Attorney* roundtable. I speak to attorneys all the time, and if you talk to them long enough, eventually they may muse on the possibility of opening their own practice, perhaps in their own home. Today, we will talk about your trials and tribulations and your recommendations for those lawyers to keep in mind. We may scare off some readers, but others will be intrigued.

Let's start with introductions and descriptions of your practice.

**Debbie Weecks:** I have a home office in the northwest Valley. I've been in practice for 11, going on 12 years. I've been a sole practitioner with a home office for about 6 of that. I have a general practice. Almost everything I do is by referral.

My areas of practice, depending of course on the clients' needs at the moment, include financial exploitation of vulnerable adults, litigation, domestic relations, probate, guardianship-conservatorship. In the last few weeks, I have been doing some other things that I will periodically get into depending on clients' needs; those involve a real estate dispute, an alleged securities violation and a business sale. There are times that I will co-counsel or refer out if I really need to, if it's a very specialized kind of area, where it serves the client better to do that.

**Art Atonna:** I've been at this practice of law business for about 27 years, and the last two years and three months, I've been in a home-based office. I went through the trials and tribulations.

I have a broad general civil practice. Over

all this time, I've done a little bit of everything. I'm even among the proud fraternity of lawyers who have had a criminal defense client executed. From soup to nuts, I've practiced everything, mostly as a sole practitioner, and now I try to limit things to noncontested domestic relations; that's the next step to no domestic relations. I also do business law, and estates and trusts, and probate, and the such.

**Guy Wolf:** I've been practicing since 1990, and I've been a solo working out of my house since 1990. My practice is generally limited to mostly landlord-tenant property management-type law, where I don't have to meet clients. I do a lot of unemployment representation for employers. I almost never have to meet the clients except at the hearings themselves. I also do quite a bit of civil litigation.

**John Lewis:** I've practiced law since October of 1960. It will be 41 years in a couple of months; that's too long! But it's fun working out of my house. I started out in a large law firm, which no longer exists, as many of them don't, and then I had my own medium-sized law firm. But since about 1972, I've been a sole practitioner, and since 1995, I've worked out of my home. I just wish I had done it about 30 years previously, because it's a great thing, and it's a lot of fun. My wife seems to like it better, even though she was bothered at first by me being around a lot; she now gets to have things done around the house, and sometimes I like to do it just to get out of working at the office. So I highly recommend it.

I think it's the greatest way to practice law, because you really don't have to advertise, you get business by word of mouth, and people don't mind your not having an office, and you can save \$20,000 or more a year by not having one, so why not do it?

I started out years ago as a general practitioner and ended up doing a lot of civil trial work; I even was a deputy county attorney in an outlying county for a couple of years. But I quit the criminal practice clear back in the '60s. And my civil trial work even included condemnation in federal and state court, and wrongful death cases; I used to do a lot of per-





**Roundtable participants  
(clockwise from top left):**

- Arthur C. Atonna**
- Bonny Brogdon**
- John Lewis**
- Diane Drain**
- Robert Erven Brown**
- Debbie Weecks**
- Guy Wolf**
- Tomi Farr**



sonal injury, but I don't anymore. I now mainly do business law.

**Diane Drain:** I left the large law firm in November of 1990 and was going to take six months to introduce myself to three new children who had just become part of my family, so I thought I would do that from the home office situation and then go out onto my own with a couple of other friends who were also leaving the large firm. That was 11 years ago, and I'm still in the home office.

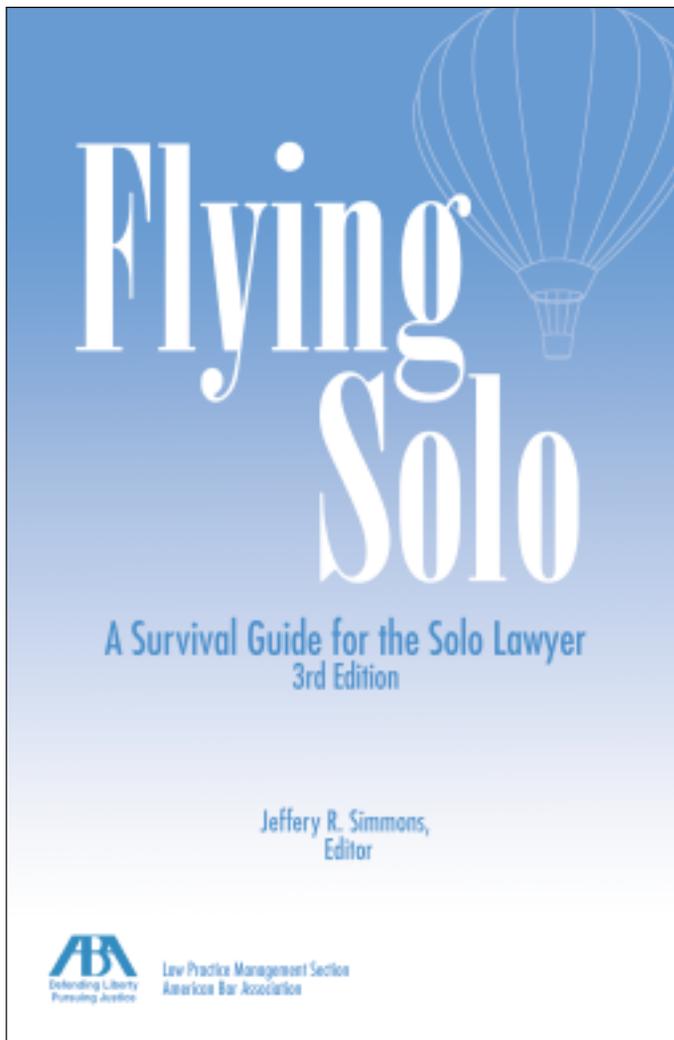
It's really worked its way into—to steal a coinage from Bob Brown—an “on-site” office, distinguished from what I perceive to be the part-time almost-professional-but-not-really office. It has worked its way into our family style.

Originally, when I left the firm to do this, I did not advertise to anyone that I was doing a home office, because I felt that it was something that wasn't as professional as the rest of my big-firm *compadres*. It was the solo section, having different members from that section over to the office for meetings and such as that, and they started admiring it and encouraging it. And as my clients began to respond in such a positive way to the reduced fees I could charge, and my family seemed to blend with it well—I just decided that it was a style of life that I would hone and perfect.

My area of practice is banking law, real estate foreclosure and workout, and bankruptcy. When you leverage it with technology, you can do it anywhere you are, with any client anywhere in the world.

**Tomi Farr:** I've been practicing since 1991. I've been on my own since October of 1994. I worked at a small firm in Phoenix for about 3½ years and—luckily, I guess—got laid off a week before I got married. How's that for a wedding present? I took a year off in between, and didn't really know what to do, because I had an infant. I didn't want to waste my education, and I wanted to be a mom. I began taking referrals from my old firm, which was too busy now that I was gone. Slowly it grew from, “OK, I'll work one day a week,” and I

PHOTOS BY ELLIOT LINCIS



## the practitioner's toolbox

arizona lawyer edits  
solo practice book

*Flying Solo: A Survival Guide for the Solo Lawyer*  
(3rd ed.), edited by Jeffrey R. Simmons  
American Bar Association Section of  
Law Practice Management, 2001  
832 pages, \$89.95  
(\$10 discount for LPM Section members)  
Paperback, ISBN 1-57073-682-0  
Available by calling 800-285-2221

More than 40 contributing authors provide valuable insights in this completely revised and expanded edition. The authors, including practitioners, law school professors and consultants, offer solutions to problems faced by solos.

This edition was edited by Jeffrey R. Simmons, a partner in the Phoenix office of DeConcini, McDonald, Yetwin & Lacy, PC. The book aims to help all solos, from those who just earned their law degree to experienced attorneys leaving large firms.

Some key topics include:

- Becoming a solo
- Selecting a location
- Recruiting and keeping efficient staff
- Choosing your technology
- Marketing yourself
- Developing effective billing systems

got me a little computer, to full-time five days a week. Out of necessity, I had to stay home because I now have three children, who are 3, 5 and 7.

Paying for day-care, making sure someone picks them up after school: All those kinds of lovely things, that to me is the beauty of my home office. I get to have lunch with my children without it being a big deal, and I love the freedom of being able to really have my own time. I specialize in bankruptcy, although I am switching gears to estate planning.

**Bonny Brogdon:** I've been practicing for a year now. Right out of the chute, I had the home office.

I try to be a general practitioner. I like it all. I want to know it all. But I'm really swinging toward civil litigation. I really like that; out of all that I have done, that's the one that I like the best.

I can't say enough about the home office. It is my way of life. I don't perceive it as being

unprofessional. I figure if I conduct myself professionally, then I will be perceived as professional. No clients have ever had a problem with the home office. Maybe it's because they are all referrals; I never advertise. If an opposing attorney has a problem with my home office, I figure that my briefs, my responses or my complaints will speak for themselves. And if I need help there, I'll go to another mentor. I love it.

**Robert Brown:** I started in 1974 with O'Connor Cavanagh. I was there for seven years, then was in a couple of small and intermediate firms. I've been in a home-office situation since 1990.

Diane is correct. I didn't [create] the traditional home office. I did try it in one corner of my extra bedroom for awhile. I didn't find that worked very well, primarily because of the evil refrigerator, which seemed to always lurk as I was passing.

We happened to move into a new home

about the time that experiment was failing; my pant sizes were increasing rapidly. So I built about 550 square feet on the end of our house and reconfigured one bay of the three-car garage into an office. So I have about 800 square feet on the end of my house that is an office with a separate entrance and an outside drop box. I commute through the laundry room in the morning, but I also leave at the end of the day and lock it. So it's really not a part of our family particularly.

I found it to be wonderful. And if you look at the economic impact of this, it is literally, over a 20- or 30-year career, it's a \$400,000 to \$800,000 savings. Because of the way ours is set up, I write myself a check every month for about \$2,000 rent. And that goes to the bottom line. Multiply that times 20 years, and you're talking about some serious retirement money.

**Eigo:** One word that many of you have used is "perception." Has that been a stumbling

block, either the perception among other attorneys or among potential clients?

**Weecks:** [Other attorneys] all gave me the same reaction: “You’re absolutely crazy; what do you mean you’re going to have a home office?” And at that time, I didn’t know anybody, in the whole world, who was an attorney practicing successfully with a home office. I just said, I don’t have a choice; I’m either going to continue in a situation I didn’t like professionally, or I was just going to start this. And I remember what they said, because they’re all still my friends today. I was fortunate, because all those same people immediately started sending me lots of work.

Today, I think many of us in this room are the envy of a lot of our colleagues. My clients love it, because my rate is half or a third of what everyone else charges. I love it because they don’t dispute their bills every time they see that I spend time on their file. The opposing counsel never has a problem with it, because if I have to do a deposition, they don’t have to travel.

I think the perception from the time I began this until now has really changed. And through the Sole Practitioners and Small Firms Section of the Bar, I’ve now met several of the people in this room and others who do the same. The concept is growing, and the acceptance of it has grown, I believe.

**Brown:** I’d like to challenge an assumption. The assumption seems to be that you either have to charge less and you don’t have resources just because your office is not in a skyscraper. I just think that’s the wrong set of assumptions to go at this with. I don’t charge a penny less for my age and experience than I would if I was down at a big firm. But on the other hand, I also don’t shortcut on the resources that I have available. My secretary has 22 years’ experience and came from a large firm. If you need a paralegal, you can find them, if you need a researcher, you can find them. Just because you don’t have an associate hiding in your closet doesn’t mean there aren’t plenty of people out there who are bright, able to research and do it quite efficiently. I have people I work with all the time, if I have calls come in, if I have research that needs to be done, I simply leave them a voice message, send them an e-mail, and the research comes

back. That’s the same thing that would happen if I was down at Smith, Jones & Barney; you’d send an e-mail down the hall and the associate would type up the memo.

So I agree that you can deliver legal services more cost-effectively if you have no overhead—my art collection bill, for example, is low. And if you want to pass that on because your particular clients demand that, that’s certainly a great way to do it. But I really don’t think that people who are considering practicing in what may be nontraditional settings should necessarily go in with the assumption that that means you’re cheap or have less resources.

**Lewis:** I have not had one bit of trouble with any of my clients, and I had a big office clear through 1995, and that’s one thing that worried me, I thought, gee, the perception.

The perception is excellent. I’ve even gained more clients. They like the fact that I’m always available. If they need something, I go to their office. If I need a secretary when mine’s away (and I’ve had the same secretary for 30 years, who works out of her house), I just hire one of the people at the court reporter’s office, and they take care of me. Nobody knows the difference, and nobody cares. I think my clients actually perceive that they get better service now than they did before.

**Drain:** My experience is that they do get better service. When I left the big firm, my corporate clients that came with me all responded very positively that they were actually getting in touch with me when they needed me, they were getting information to me rather than it coming through three layers. I was being able to respond to them within hours rather than days. As far as cutting corners, I find that, at least in my situation, I never cut a corner because I have the time to be able to think ahead. If anything, I may be the bane to the existence of adverse counsel because I’m able to get that fax responded back that evening when they get in.

**Weecks:** At least 20 percent of the time, my clients come to me after they’ve been at a firm where nobody’s paying attention to them. And I cannot tell you the things that they tell me or that I see in the paperwork they’re get-

ting that are not acceptable to some of our standards. And it’s not because the place they just came from is not a nice firm with intelligent people; nobody’s paying close attention.

**Wolf:** I’ve found the same thing, at least in my area of work. Almost 90 percent of my work is either landlord-tenant work or unemployment hearings. For the unemployment hearings, I’ll sometimes have less than 24 hours’ notice. The bigger firms got out of that business because they can’t put somebody out on a hearing with 24 hours’ notice. Oh, my God, if they can’t docket it for 30 days out, they just can’t do it. I do it all the time, and I make a pretty good living just doing unemployment hearings. By the time my client faxes me an eviction that they need done, by the time they manage to find a phone to find out if I got the fax, I’ve usually got the pleading out in the box for the process server to come get. Whereas a lot of firms that do it, even the smaller firms, they’ll have to hold pleadings, evictions, and they’ll hold them until they get a bunch of them because it’s not cost-efficient for them to go do one. So my clients get instantaneous service. No downtown firm is going to do that.

**Brogdon:** I’m a general practitioner, and that means I want to know how to do it all. I found myself referring out the big-dollar cases. I could do that, [because] my husband makes a good living, and my start-up costs were only my professional liability, my phone and my Internet service. I listened to my mentors, who said, “You cannot take so many diverse cases and do any of them justice.”

As a general practitioner, I think I can be very selective in the cases. I can take the righteous cases that another lawyer couldn’t.

**Farr:** I love being my own boss. I love being able to talk to someone who’s crying, saying, I can’t support my eight kids, and my husband went to Mexico, and I’m losing my home, and I say, “Fine, I’ll file the case, all you have to do is pay the filing fee.” “Well, how much does it cost you [as the lawyer]?” “Don’t worry about it,” I can say. That makes me feel good. I like being a good person, and I can do that. I can do what I want, and that’s the big thing.

**Eigo:** The benefits to clients that I hear are

“always available” and “instantaneous service” and “you do everything yourself.” Are these drawbacks, as well? Do clients expect that you will call them at 8 or 9 at night because you’re “home”?

**Farr:** That can go both ways. I have done it. But the problem with that is that I get calls at 8 or 9 or 10. I’ve had them call on Friday evening, call on Saturday, call on Sunday, and by Monday, they say, “I’ve called you four times and you haven’t called me back.” So I have to gently remind them sometimes that it’s a courtesy if I called at 6. Who else can you call at 8:00 on Friday and get them?

For the most part, my clients love that they call and I answer the phone.

**Wolf:** The hardest part about doing this, especially for the newer practitioner, is knowing when to say no. I had that problem. I’ll get the call at 7, 8 o’clock, 10 o’clock at night, but you just have to discipline yourself to let it ring. Occasionally, I’ll get an emergency call where somebody will call on the weekend, and I let it ring, but I’ll stand there and listen to it just to see if it’s an emergency, and they appreciate the fact that, if it is an emergency, when they start talking, I pick it up. But I make it clear that I just happened to be there.

**Brown:** When I leave the office at 5 or 6 or whatever it is, I negotiate through the laundry room and the phone doesn’t ring in the house. For people who are considering leaving a traditional law office, you need to focus on why you’re doing it and what elements are really inherent to the home office situation, because home office can mean a lot of different things. It can literally mean putting it in your living room, where you live with it all the time. Maybe there are some circumstances where that’s appropriate. But for a traditional commercial real estate practice, that’s really inappropriate. I don’t take calls after 6:00 or on weekends; my wife would kill me, for one thing.

**Drain:** My initial introduction with my clients, when I go through what I call “the rules of this office,” includes that I only answer the phone during traditional office hours, that if it is an emergency, they are welcome to leave a voicemail.

**Attona:** Another thing that [home-based

practice] has forced me to do is to be more selective on the cases that I take, even though it may sound professionally intriguing and challenging, the case that’s going to require me to drop everything and spend the next 40 hours of my practice working on that client’s case right now. That’s going to screw up a lot of other things. That’s one thing that I’ve worked on in my own mind, saying no in some cases where in the past I would have said yes.

The other area where I have to think about the reality of taking a particular case is if it’s the kind of case where I know that traditionally most of the work is done by paraprofessionals. A judge in approving an attorney’s fees bill may look at it and say, “You can’t justify charging for all of those documents at that rate,” because those are traditionally done by paraprofessionals. I have to think of whether it’s going to lend itself to my getting compensated.



Have you flown the large firm coop to start your own practice? Practiced out of your house? Have you seen both sides but prefer larger firm life? Write to [soundoff@azbar.org](mailto:soundoff@azbar.org) to express your own stories of home-office joy or woe.

**Eigo:** What about support staff?

**Attona:** I have found that unless you have long-term, loyal, very experienced assistants, I would be out of control [of staff], but I’m paying the bill, I’m paying the gross salary.

**Brown:** I have a full-time secretary, a half-time bookkeeper. I looked at the home-office set-up as just trying to distill the essential elements of my particular practice and to determine whether they really needed to be in a remote location, and for me, they really didn’t. I’m certified as a specialist in real estate law and do primarily commercial transactions, buying and selling businesses, that sort of thing. Most of the cases I work with, the attorneys on the other side are with major firms, because we tend to do million-dollar-and-up transactions. I’ve found that by developing a law firm without walls, I actually get better, more responsive service if you develop a group of co-practitioners—some at small firms, and some even with large firms—where you’re able to gener-

ate work; you become an asset to them and they become an asset to you. You get to pick the people you want to work with instead of just who happens to be down the hall at your particular firm. I really went into the home office with the idea that I was going to create a law firm without walls, although we do not have committee meetings, by agreement, and we don’t share letterhead or name. But I have a tax specialist, a securities specialist, bankruptcy people, labor lawyers, general civil litigators and so forth, that I regularly refer work to and vice versa. We are available to each other on pretty much the same basis as I found existed at the large law firm.

**Drain:** I agree. When I take on a case, I’m not necessarily taking it on as the only attorney on board. I may have one attorney doing the tax aspects of the bankruptcy, another attorney doing the litigation part of whatever is contested. I may be doing the administrative part of that. People ask me, how much staff do I have? Literally, it depends on what I’m doing.

**Eigo:** Does anyone have no staff?

**Lewis:** Big firms have this way of turning things over to other people in their office, paralegals, junior partners. I do everything myself, and I love to see these pleadings come in where they really haven’t “got it” because two or three people are working on it, and they don’t exactly get it right. And a think a sole practitioner, and especially one who works out of his own home, has time to do everything himself, get the big picture, and doesn’t make nearly as many mistakes or technical errors as some of the big firms make.

**Farr:** Doing things myself doesn’t bother me. When I was at the firm, I had a paralegal, I had a secretary, both worked just for me. I would dictate a letter, she would type it, I’d review it, she’d print it in final form and put it in the file. I said, “Give me a computer, for God’s sakes, I can type it faster than I can dictate it.” “Oh, no, absolutely not, attorneys don’t type. That is a waste of your intelligence and your time.”

The senior partners didn’t do anything on their own, I mean nothing touched their hands. And I thought, I like doing everything for myself. Number 1, I know it gets done, and number 2, I’m the only one who can



Bob Brown practices from his converted garage.

answer to the mistakes. You have to have that kind of personality. You have to be humbled a little bit to be able to say, “Yeah, I typed my own documents.”

**Lewis:** Back in the '70s, I was trying a condemnation case in Prescott, and I typed a whole bunch of stuff myself. I said, “Your Honor, I typed that all myself.” And he said, “I could tell.”

**Weecks:** I do my own bookkeeping and taxes, my own typing, my own copying.

**Wolf:** To me, if you're going to be a sole practitioner, business experience is more important than law experience. Even a halfway competent lawyer can make a good living as a lawyer, but you won't do it as a sole practitioner unless you have business experience.

I was a building and electrical contractor for 10 or 15 years before I even went to law school. It was always my wife and I doing everything anyway. When I was lucky enough to go to law school and get not only one but two semesters of legal clinic, and one semester of practice court, assuming that we all come out about as competent as one another with knowledge of the law, the business experience and the practical experiences are going to make your living. So when I started, I had a computer, I had a printer, I had two clients and a telephone line. It's built up now to where I probably have all the same technological bells and whistles that any major firm has, and I can do everything myself. The drawback is, of course, I have to do everything myself. If I don't do it, it doesn't get done. So I probably put in just as many hours as I did when I worked for the firm, and I only bill for about half of that. So in one aspect, half the time I'm working for nothing; the other half I'm getting to keep everything I make. The balance is, you still make several times more money than you did when you were working for the firm.

But nobody's saying this is a Shangri-La.

**Atonna:** Anybody thinking about [sole practice] should not think it's a piece of cake. I think spending a lot of time talking to people who already do this type of work is a prerequisite to jumping off that high-dive ladder, because that makes a big difference about how well you splash in the pool: Have you done

your homework?

**Wolf:** I'd say 90 percent of the lawyers that I've met probably couldn't do this.

**Eigo:** Why is that?

**Wolf:** This is just a business; we just happen to have a different product. As in any case, a lot of people just aren't cut out for it. They don't like having to set their own calendar, make their own contacts, promote themselves, that's the biggest part. We all know that in every 100-person firm, really only five or six people are true rainmakers. We all have to be our own rainmaker or we get wet.

**Drain:** I had 15 years of paralegal-legal secretary and office management experience before law school. I felt myself terribly blessed because I had this whole picture and I knew what it took to manage a business to make it successful.

**Wolf:** I'd like to thank the person in charge of the Law School Clinic at ASU, because she made us do every aspect of file management. We had to learn how to open a file, how to docket a file, how to keep a calendar, how to back up that calendar, how to make your appointments, and we all cursed her when we were there and we all are thanking her now that we're in practice.

**Eigo:** Do other lawyers ever ask you what home practice is like?

**Drain:** I think one of the most interesting questions I have asked of me is “How do you make yourself go to work?” And I look at them and I say, “Well, how do you? You have to get in the car and drive for how long? In what kind of traffic? And deal with people you don't want to deal with? Taking clients you don't want to take? How do *you* go to work?”

**Atonna:** For me, there's a certain amount of discipline to maintaining a traditional business day lifestyle. The kids are grown and gone, my wife is

away at work, so it's just me and the air conditioner humming along.

I have to have a mind-set. There's no door, it leads right into the hallway. There's an invisible door there. It takes a certain type of personality that can discipline themselves to be able to live in that environment and not be totally distracted.



## solos— a breed apart

*Rare is the group of lawyers whose conversation about their work can be suffused with talk of—the family dog. Home-office lawyers are one such group. Here are excerpts from just a few of their laughs and cautions about the pooch in the parlor.*

**ART ATONNA:** I talked to people and tried to decide what to do and how to do it. I talked to Diane [Drain], and one thing she told me to do was to get a dog, and that was the worst advice I could have gotten from anybody, because as I was training this dog one day, I had a very serious client sitting on the sofa in my office. The dog was outside, and I said “Thank God he's outside,” but all of a sudden he came through the doggie door and just leaped in this poor guy's lap on the blind side. Don't give that advice to anybody else.

**DIANE DRAIN:** The dogs are allowed up to the doorstep of my office.

**ROBERT BROWN:** Our dogs can come over [to the office], but by invitation only.

**BONNY BROGDON:** Working with a big firm was never an option for me; it was incompatible with my family, my husband and my dog.

**DRAIN:** I don't need these false borders anymore to dictate to me whether I'm a lawyer today or I'm mom today or I'm wife today—or dog trainer.

**JOHN LEWIS:** Unlike Art, I have two dogs and I like 'em, because when I get frustrated over my clients I can go pet my dogs.

**DEBBIE WEECKS:** Doesn't anybody have a cat?

**Eigo:** How would you describe your offices?

**Drain:** That was one of the focuses for me when I got to the end of my six months and realized that I could actually do this, and do this for real. But then that dictated that I had to, at least my perception, build a separate building, so we took the garage and turned it into a full, freestanding, outside-access [office]. I see my clients there. I paneled it, I wallpapered it, it looks just like my 33<sup>rd</sup> floor office down at Bank One. I had to make it my office so that emotionally when I went to work I went to work.

**Lewis:** All my kids are raised, so I just took a bedroom in my house, and I made it an office. And I put a couch in it, and a desk in it, and a computer thing: It looks like a bedroom with a couch and a desk in it. But my clients don't mind. And I like it myself. I get up anytime I want to, I put on my tank top and my shorts, and I go to work. I do not dress up unless I am coming to something like this, going to the court or to the bank.

**Atonna:** I took over the living room. It was a beautiful living room before; now it's a nice-looking office, and I had to convince my wife that that was OK, and she's been cooperative. And that's one of the ingredients too, is getting the buy-in from all the participants in the household that this is going to work.

**Farr:** I tend to find that friends, family and neighbors are the ones that don't take me seriously. I constantly get people dropping by. When I drop my kids off in the morning, they're like, "Oh, you're not working." If I'm wearing a T-shirt and shorts, "Oh, you're not working today?" "Yeah, I'm working today, I work every day." Unless I [am dressed up], nobody thinks I'm working. And that tends to be probably my largest burden. Because they think I work at home, it's not a big deal.

**Eigo:** Do you see specific benefits to your family life of home-office practice?

**Drain:** I had gotten to the point at the firm where I was questioning what I was doing and why I was doing what I was doing. What brought that to a head was my sister had to take my daughter to pick out her eighth-grade

graduation dress; I couldn't do it. It was like a light coming on. And then I thought, "I'm not good enough to be the lawyer, because I won't bill the way my firm was dictating that I should bill." Stepping back, taking that six-month period of time, I realized instead what I was questioning was "Can I play the way everybody else is playing?" Instead, can I write my own rules and figure out how to be a lawyer within my own arena?

It took the family, though, buying into this perception. The family had to accept that I was at work and that it was a professional environment.

**Lewis:** I have been married 45 years. I noticed that when I used to work at the office, I would come home and it would take about a half-hour for her to unload and get things off her chest. That's understandable, especially with four kids. But the last five years have been very wonderful, because I'm home. I step out of the office when I get tired, we sit and we chat. It's really a much more pleasant home life than it was before. I really think at least as far as your spouse is concerned, it's one of the best things I ever did.

**Farr:** I'm having a little harder time. My 3-year-old doesn't get it.

**Wolf:** I used to get up at 5:15 in the morning, I would fight what little traffic there was to leave at 6:00 so that I could get to the firm and actually get something done before other people came in, and yet they still expected me to stay there until 6, 6:15, because the partners were there, and they didn't think you were working unless you worked while they were there, even though you were working for two hours before they even got out of bed in the morning. So what kind of family life is that when you're doing that five days a week?

**Farr:** It's the best thing I've ever done for my kids, I know that.

**Eigo:** Do you have any suggestions about what makes someone thrive at home and solo practice? Is there a personality that goes along with it? Someone who works at the New York State Bar has said, "Sole practitioners have to get some satisfaction out of chaos." Is that true?

**Drain:** I think we all like being our own boss. We answer to ourselves, we pat ourselves on the back, and we flog ourselves. We take a great pride in the quality of what we produce and the respect we get back from our clients. We practice law because we love what we're doing; it's not just a paycheck.

**Brown:** A key test: Ask people how many committee meetings they attend every week, and how many they like. If the answer is, "Too many, and I didn't like any of them," they'll be good sole practitioners.

**Eigo:** How do you sustain your practice?

**Weeks:** I've got to thank the solo section, because I got so many referrals that way and through my colleagues locally. This is how I built up a network of friends, too. When I need something, or when my friends need something, you have someone to call.

I do a lot of public speaking. When I was speaking at ASU Law School, [another lawyer] said that the most important part of her practice, being self-employed, is never turn down an opportunity if you're asked to speak to a group. You're doing a public service, and at the same time you're marketing.

**Drain:** We all go outside of what we're doing; we market ourselves, we look for other resources, we volunteer in other areas. We would not be successful if we simply got up and "went in to work" and that was it.

**Wolf:** Every client in the world that every lawyer has ever had has either gone out of business or died at some point. So you cannot expect that every client you have is going to be all you need for the rest of your career.

I give free seminars to property managers and Realtors; I speak often at the Southeast Valley Board of Realtors. I'll get a couple of clients here, a couple there, and as long as you keep getting more clients than you lose just through attrition, you'll always have work.

**Atonna:** That's why we're a different breed of cat, because not everybody can do that, not everybody has the makeup to wear all these different hats. ▀