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K. William Gibson's *Flying Solo: A Survival Guide for the Solo and Small Firm Lawyer*, 5th ed. (book review)

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Gibson, William K., ed., *Flying Solo: A Survival Guide for the Solo and Small Firm Lawyer, Fifth Edition*. Chicago: American Bar Association, 2014. 496p. \$99.95.

*Reviewed by Brian T. Detweiler**

¶83 *Flying Solo: A Survival Guide for the Solo and Small Firm Lawyer, Fifth Edition* is a practical and easy-to-read guide for the experienced attorney or the new graduate looking to start a solo or small firm practice. The contributors are seasoned solo practitioners or experts from other fields who share their wisdom and advice on the practical aspects of opening and operating a small law office. As the authors make clear, a successful solo attorney must be both a savvy businessperson and a competent lawyer with a firm grasp of management, finance, technology, and marketing.

¶84 The fifth edition of *Flying Solo* is organized into five parts, essentially mirroring those areas of competency. Each part consists of several individually authored chapters covering specific aspects of the overarching topical area. Among these seemingly disparate topics of discussion, several common themes emerge throughout the book, including the importance of introspection, specialization, and communication, as well as various strategies for lowering costs.

¶85 The title of the first chapter asks readers, “Are you cut out for solo practice?” This begins what becomes a recurring theme: prospective and current solo practitioners are asked to evaluate themselves, their practices, and their procedures. Attorneys should first know themselves to ensure that they have the independent temperament to be happy as a solo, while also knowing which areas of law they would like to target from a marketing perspective. Meanwhile, regular evaluation of practices and procedures, and strategic planning, can ensure greater efficiency, profitability, and adaptability.

¶86 In addition to devoting a chapter to why an attorney should specialize in a particular field of law, the advantages associated with focusing one’s practice appear in other parts of the book as well. Not only does specialization make sense from a competency perspective in today’s increasingly complex society, it also allows a

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practitioner to become a recognized authority in a particular area. This recognition may lead to higher fees, referrals from other attorneys, and the ability to represent larger commercial clients. Specialists also avoid the increased malpractice risks associated with practicing in unfamiliar areas and are usually able to work more efficiently than general practitioners, all of which contributes to a more profitable practice.

¶87 Another means of increasing profitability is by lowering costs, which several authors address throughout the book. While some authors present more radical options, like laying off full-time staff and outsourcing nonlegal duties to offsite service providers, others demonstrate opportunities to save money by leveraging technology, like using document assembly software, free and low-cost online resources and collaboration tools, and converting print documents to digital files. And while only the most committed Luddite would argue with the wisdom of “replac[ing] thirty-two filing cabinets with a 32 GB flash drive” (p.386), the authors do an excellent job of alerting readers to potential drawbacks and suggesting procedures to implement new technologies with minimal disruption.

¶88 James A. Calloway describes poor communication skills as “the number one complaint against lawyers” (p.10), which explains why perhaps the most persistent theme in the book is the necessity for solo attorneys to communicate regularly with their clients. Several authors stress that regular communication is essential to satisfy clients. This leads to more business through word-of-mouth referrals, creates higher realization rates because happy clients are more likely to pay their legal bills, and can prevent misunderstandings by keeping clients apprised of an attorney’s progress on a matter. In fact, one author relates how communication can also be an important aspect of marketing: by visiting clients “off the clock” and asking them about their businesses and families, he not only improved his personal relationships with his clients, but also (he estimated) generated “immediate business in more than 80 percent of cases” (p.412).

¶89 *Flying Solo* is filled with similar advice from many authors with varying experiences and areas of expertise. Although one consequence of multiple authors is that the information in individual chapters can be redundant or even contradictory¹⁷ at times, reading about a topic from different perspectives can also provide more nuanced treatment. The latest edition incorporates information on strategic planning and new trends in technology like cloud computing and social media. However, the omission of chapters on chemical dependency, coping with stress, and closing a solo practice from the previous edition is unfortunate given that these issues are just as important today as they were nine years ago.

¶90 *Flying Solo* should be on the shelf of every law school career services office and academic law library. The book can be read from cover to cover easily, and probably should be if readers are new to solo practice. Even experienced solo attorneys will find valuable information on making their practices more profitable and efficient.

17. Compare, e.g., “With cloud computing, there’s no need to purchase servers and software; no need to pay expensive annual licensing fees or software upgrade fees; no need to hire IT staff to maintain servers, address security concerns, and stay on top of software updates” (p.298), with “File sizes and upload/download speed may make cloud-based storage impractical, and the cost of local network storage makes it very attractive compared with cloud storage” (pp.393–94).