



COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Quick Tips for Improving Practice Management

“I have seen that in any great undertaking it is not enough for a man to depend simply upon himself.” ~ Isna-la-wica (Lone Man), Teton Sioux

The Colorado Supreme Court declared October as Legal Professionalism Month in Colorado. The purpose of Professionalism Month is to encourage members of the legal profession to rededicate themselves to demonstrating the highest standards of professionalism and integrity and promote public confidence in the profession and the court system.

What is professionalism? Webster defines it as “the skill, good judgment, and polite behavior that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well.” Doesn’t sound like much fun, does it? The good news is that professionalism is, at its core, about relationships. In fact, one of the biggest predictors of malpractice claims is not about making mistakes, but rather a lack of interpersonal relationship skills. How are your relationships with your co-workers, opposing counsel, and clients? Are you networking and attending law related functions to stay “in the loop” to keep your collegial relationships going?

There are a few things lawyers can do on a daily basis to improve relationships and create a higher level of professionalism. See how many of these you do on a daily basis, and pick a few that you need to catch-up on:

1. **Client Relations:** Are you returning calls within 24 to 48 hours? Are you completing work in a timely fashion? Are you communicating effectively with clients regarding the status of their case?
2. **Confidentiality:** Are you protecting client information? Are client files kept out of areas where other clients could see them, such as on your desk? Do you refrain from having conversations with clients in places where others might overhear you?
3. **Conflicts of Interest:** Do you maintain, and continuously update, a master list of clients/parties/employees/and other individuals with cross references to files to facilitate researching apparent conflicts of interest? Do you always obtain a signed waiver from the client if representation is requested after a potential conflict has been discussed?
4. **Docketing and Calendaring:** Does your calendar include statutes of limitations, all court appearances, client and other appointments, discretionary deadlines, etc? Do you have a good system for updating and maintaining each calendar?
5. **Records Management:** Do you have a standardized filing system for all client files? Are all materials filed timely and regularly?

6. **Professional Practice:** Do you have a designated back-up attorney for your files? Do you regularly attend CLEs? Have you completed a succession plan?

Remember: Your reputation as a professional, competent attorney is not just based on winning “the big cases,” but is based on taking care of the daily communication and case management tasks that help build good relationships with your clients and colleagues.

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