



RISK MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

ARTICLES

Dabbling is Dangerous |



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DABBLING IS DANGEROUS

In an ABA magazine feature last December, *Practice Pitfalls*, the writer David Sasseville advises, “If you don’t know it, don’t do it.” That’s a good general rule of thumb. However, in a real world environment, newly admitted lawyers have to start practicing law with no practical experience, and in a difficult economic climate, experienced lawyers have to learn new practice areas. So how do you conquer the learning curve? Here are a few tips to get you started in the right direction.

- 1. Associate counsel.** This might have cost associated with it early on, but having an experienced practitioner walk you through the process once or twice might be all you need to handle the next case on your own. How to find counsel to associate? Network in your local legal community, contact your law school for available alumni who are willing to work with fellow alums or look to your local bar association for contacts in the practice area.
- 2. Educate yourself.** Look for CLE programs in your new practice area and consider the cost start-up expenses. Attending CLE classes in your new practice area is also a great way to expand your network to include lawyers who might be willing to associate with you on cases or to serve a mentoring role answering your questions and offering guidance along the way.
- 3. Use the resources of your bar association.** Some have costs associated with them such as CLE programs, but others are free or have reduced fees attached. The Mecklenburg Bar Association is hosting a series of networking events called “Coffee Connections” where lawyers meet after work at the Bar Center. The November 9th event will provide resources on mentoring, suggested client agreements and vendors catering to solo/small firms. The Wake County Bar Association newsletter, The Wake Bar Flyer, includes meeting notices for at least 10 niche bar meetings from criminal law to family law. These meetings provide a great place to find a practitioner in your new area of specialty. The Wake Bar Flyer also includes a list of 21 committees. Another great way to get involved and meet your fellow lawyers. The Greensboro Bar Association is offering a new program this year, a law practice management colloquia. These presentations promote law practice management solutions to make your practice more successful. In early October, Erik Mazzone presented a technology program “Thirty Tips in Thirty Minutes: Technology and Law Practice Management Websites Designed to Help Lawyers Better Serve Their Clients”. If lawyers learn to manage their practices effectively early on, chances are fewer bar grievances and malpractice claims.
- 4. Get involved in a mentoring program.** Gene Pridgen, president of the North Carolina Bar Association has named mentoring as one of his priorities during his term. The NCBA is developing a program that will bring together experienced practitioners and young professionals. Lawyers Mutual is sponsoring this program as we believe effective mentoring programs will help lawyers bridge the

gap from book smart to practical experience. Many local bars have mentoring programs in place. The Mecklenburg Bar is serving as a leader by offering a mentoring program called Linking Lawyers which is designed to be a resource for networking and professionalism guidance, as well as to provide an introduction into diverse areas of the law.

- 5. Call on Lawyers Mutual claims attorneys.** If you are insured with Lawyers Mutual, maximize your premium dollars by calling on our claims lawyers for advice and guidance. Our team of seven claims attorneys spends their days talking with lawyers about their cases and potential problems. You can brainstorm ideas or just call and ask for help. Our client services department (and our website) provide risk management advice, forms, checklists, articles, as well as free CLE for insureds.

It's scary out there. Dabbling in a practice area where you have no experience is daunting, as well as dangerous. While it may be tempting to take any client that walks in the door regardless of your knowledge of the practice area, don't underestimate the cost, aggravation and heartache of a bar grievance or malpractice claim. Put into practice the tips above and before you know it, you'll be the lawyer to which others refer business in your new field.