



BOOK REVIEW: "Solo by Choice – How to Be the Lawyer You Always Wanted to Be" by Carolyn Elefant

Reviewed by Sylvia Low

Ever wake up at night in cold sweat wondering if your decision to go solo is tantamount to career suicide?

Going solo may be a terrifying experience for a novice. There are a thousand decisions to make, from fundamental to seemingly trivial. Every lawyer who dreams of breaking out of the cog-in-the-wheel grind and practising law "YOUR" way - this book is the encouragement and support you are looking for.

"Solo by Choice" by Carolyn Elefant is packed with practical down-to-earth advice on what you need in order to make it work as a solo practice. The author tackles a wide range of topics with extraordinary depth and detail; addressing fundamental setup issues such as location (where to set up); home office v office space; developing a practice area; how to find good suppliers and human resource planning and execution. No topic is beyond discussion as she delves into how to negotiate severance pay when you leave your firm; and how to manage the "client from hell". Best of all, the author helpfully provides standard forms and step-by-step guides on everything from writing a business plan to creating a precedent library.

Law practice owners who have been running their own practice for a while will also benefit richly from her advice on the financial and client-relationship demands of legal practice. Her evaluation of alternative billing methods, personnel management methods, cash flow management and time management are insightful and realistic. For solos facing "growing pains" the book discusses affiliations, collaborative and project partnering, networking and growing reliable revenue streams. The chapters on marketing are especially good as they focus on how to market professional services.

The author, Carolyn Elefant, ventured out on her own in 1993 after working at a federal agency, and following that, a top tier US law firm. She has since built a successful small practice specialising in energy regulatory and enforcement law. A champion of solos and small law firms, Elefant is a fixture on the law blogosphere.

The author's style is simple and refreshingly direct. She takes a forthright and commonsensical approach in the manner of a personal business coach who has invested in your success yet knows that you need the unvarnished truth - all facts laid bare - before you strike out on your own. She shares anecdotes and lessons from her own experience of going solo after many years in a large practice; and includes interviews with other solo and small practice lawyers.

This balanced approach to the challenges of operating your own practice has been lauded by many practice consultants and bar associations. Jordan Furlong, editor of the Canadian Bar Association magazine describes "Solo by Choice" as an "outstanding guide to the practical realities of being a lawyer, absolutely essential for solo and small-firm lawyers...". Chuck Newton, a solo lawyer and blogger calls it a "detailed and inspirational road map for anybody who wants to succeed in the practice of law..."

Carolyn Elefant has dedicated her book to solo and small firm lawyers, encouraging them to -

"Realize that no matter what stage you're at in your legal career, it's not too late to follow your heart. Once upon a time, Thoreau wrote, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you imagined." Maybe starting a solo law practice is the path you were intended to take all along".

"Solo by Choice – How to Be the Lawyer You Always Wanted to Be" by Carolyn Elefant is available on loan from Bizibody Technology – Call 6236 2848

If you would like advice on, or simply to chat about, running your law practice, the **Law Society's "Practice Consult"** initiative provides free counselling on practice management matters for members.

Call Serena Lim / Sylvia Low at telephone 6236 2848 during office hours, from Mondays to Fridays.