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WHAT WE'RE SOLVED:

The end of another year looms, with all of its appropriate reflection and slate-wiping. But now it's time to set your compass for the coming year. Want a little help drafting those 2017 New Year's resolutions? We asked twenty plus experts, lawyers and professionals who work with lawyers, **"What's the single resolution you recommend for practicing lawyers in 2017?"** This can be your best year yet. Be it resolved:

ONE REALLY GOOD IDEA EVERY DAY
attorneyatwork 

WE'RE SOLVED:

DO ONE THING.

Life is full of distractions; it is impossible to accomplish everything you set out to. For most attorneys, there is never enough time in the day. When the clock strikes midnight on December 31, 2016 (OK, maybe wait until the morning), it's time to take a step back and refocus. What is the "one thing" that you want and can accomplish in the next year? Maybe it is to increase your profits by X amount, hire a new staff member, move into new office space, or take a vacation. This goal should guide everything you do this next year. Write it out and post it conspicuously in your office; come back to it every time you make a decision. Then, at midnight on December 31, 2017, call me up to tell me that you have achieved your goal!



Heidi Alexander

Director Massachusetts Law Office
Management Assistance Program
Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

SET MANAGEABLE GOALS.

Personally, I have various resolutions for 2017. They include running more often so that I can run faster, practicing guitar scales so that I can play a few favorites for my three-year-old niece and nephew, and taking a cooking class with my son, because he asked me to. The best thing that attorneys can do in the New Year is to set manageable goals like these and hold themselves accountable to achieving them, either by making a small financial investment, partnering with someone they do not want to disappoint, or establishing a due date that is as firm as possible.



Ari Kaplan
Ari Kaplan Advisors

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

USE CHECKLISTS.

Identify something you know you should be doing, but never actually get done, and systematize it. Do you always mean to send a disengagement letter but other things signal a matter closed so you just skip it? Use that disengagement letter to trigger the start of the retention period, the archiving of files and correspondence, return of trust monies, letting the client know how and if you will keep documents, thanking them for their business, getting feedback through a satisfaction survey, alerting them to outstanding balances, asking for referrals, etc. Now document that process based on the triggering event, with a checklist. You will find it works so well you may document other processes, too!



Catherine Sanders Reach
Director, Law Practice
Management & Technology
The Chicago Bar Association

WE'VE RESOLVED:

LEARN TO MULTIPLY.

Lawyers spend a lot of time marketing – especially solo and small firm lawyers. And that makes sense: Attorneys in small law practices face lots of competition, and must out-hustle their peers to build and maintain a client base. But there are ways to expand your marketing reach without multiplying your effort. The key is to repurpose everything you do. Convert your blog posts into an eBook. Turn your in-person presentation into a video. Transform a meeting at a networking event into a referral pipeline. Almost any one thing you can do, you can get more out of. So, here's your New Year's resolution: Take one thing you do, and multiply its effect by five.



Jared Correia
CEO, Red Cave
Law Firm Consulting

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SHIFT TO RELEVANCE

Without it, there's no reason to engage with you, or even remember you. You'll never have the right audience for your article, speech, or networking, because you have no selection criteria. If you don't have the right audience, you have the wrong one, which guarantees that nobody will respond. Whether you intend it or not, your communication is probably mostly about you: your experience, your expertise, your firm. It's not that people don't believe your claims. It's that they can't afford to care because you haven't made yourself relevant. Lack of relevance is the source of your business development frustrations. Until your experience, expertise, accomplishments, and firm are relevant to your prospects' world, those assets don't exist. This new year, get relevant.



Mike O'Horo
Founder
RainmakerVT

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

SET ASIDE NETWORKING TIME.

Let me help. First, repeat after me: “I have decided that I will devote two hours to networking every week, on Friday.” Why Friday? Because most courts are closed and most professionals are burned out. When Friday? Breakfast! You may not get onto the lunch calendar of busy professionals for weeks but I guarantee you won’t have that problem with a breakfast meeting at their favorite place, right? Make notes on your contact cards about nice breakfast places that are convenient to where they work and are open at 7:00 or 7:30 a.m. If your networking budget is lean, relax, no one orders cocktails for breakfast. The big question while your order is being cooked? “What kind of business clients can I send your way?” You know what their question back to you will be. Let networking fuel your financial health in 2017.



Sheila M. Blackford
Practice Management Advisor
Oregon State Bar Professional
Liability Fund

WE BIT ARE SOL VED:

PUT ALL CLIENT INFORMATION IN THE DIGITAL FILE.

You've already done this with docketing dates and deadlines, so resolve in 2017 to have the same discipline with every bit of client information. Whoever opens the mail should check for deadlines and scan the correspondence into the client's digital file. If you take a few pages of handwritten notes about a file, scan and file them in the digital client file. Receipts for payments need to go to accounting – but first scan them to the digital client file. Save emails as PDF files in the digital client file. This is a simple resolution, but it is not an easy one. Old habits die hard, as the saying goes. But keeping critical client information in numerous locations throughout your office is an old habit that must die and you should set its execution date for 2017.



Jim Calloway
Director, Management
Assistance Program
Oklahoma Bar Association

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

BE MORE DELIBERATE.

Rather than glibly agreeing to everything that comes your way or aimlessly following every so-called opportunity, consider things more deeply, even if only for a moment, before heading pell-mell down every path. That is not to say you should resist saying yes — or automatically say no. That would miss the point of being deliberate. The point is to be more engaged in what's going on, instead of letting the rush of life talk you out of claiming the right to live your life. That also is not to say you can avoid the need to do anything you don't want to do. However, you will better understand why you are doing what you are doing. Then, even if it is uncomfortable, you can lean into the discomfort and get the job done with a sense of meaning. Too idealistic? Maybe, but that's the point — trying to live just a bit more ideally.



Vedia Jones-Richardson
Principal and Attorney
Olive & Olive, PA

WE
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RESOLVED:

GET BETTER SLEEP.

One of the most common (and preventable) problems that lawyers have is poor or inadequate sleep. Getting regular, quality sleep helps your memory, your energy levels, your physical health, your emotional health, and your problem-solving skills (just to name a few benefits). Don't sacrifice sleep to "do more" or waste that time worrying about things outside of your control. A well-rested lawyer is an effective and healthy lawyer. Make it your resolution to practice good sleep hygiene and have a well-rested 2017!



Shawn Healy, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist
Massachusetts Lawyers
Concerned for Lawyers

WE BETTER RESOLVED:

LISTEN.

The single best thing you can do to improve your communication skills in 2017 is to work on becoming a more active listener. Lawyers spend a lot of time thinking about the best ways to speak and write. But communication runs two ways. Perhaps you know the story about the lawyer who was thinking about the next deposition question instead of listening to the answer and flubbed the follow-up, missing an important discovery opportunity. Whether it's your client, opposing counsel, or a witness, resolve to always really listen to the other person.



Teddy (Theda) Snyder
Mediator/Attorney at Law
WCMediator.com

WE ARE RESOLVED:

LIVE MINDFULLY AND PRACTICE PURPOSEFULLY!

Don't continue to suffer in silence both mentally and physically. To combat the growing negative statistics concerning lawyers' health, bar associations have embraced wellness programs, and a plethora of information on yoga and meditation for lawyers is now widely available. Take note and plan to meet with a mental health professional for an annual checkup, just as you would for an annual physical! Whether working hard for a client or just getting up to face another day, pay close attention to your body, spirit, and mental well-being. To live and practice with purpose daily is a lofty goal — but a very attainable one.



Natalie Robinson Kelly
Director, Law Practice
Management Program
State Bar of Georgia

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

START SAYING NO.

If you're like most lawyers, when it comes to marketing, you merely react to requests and opportunities. Someone asks you to write an article, play in a golf tournament, sponsor a table or event, speak at a seminar, give some free advice or go to lunch — but in many cases, these activities are not worthwhile. You end up writing on a topic that is not of interest to you, addressing the wrong audience, having lunch with someone who wants something from you but can't give you anything in return, or shortchanging the work you have from paying clients. My advice? Resolve to just say no. Remember, every minute you spend doing something that's not supporting your goals is a minute you could be doing something you enjoy, spending time with your family or building the practice you really want.



Sally J. Schmidt
President
Schmidt Marketing, Inc.

WE'RE SOLVED:

FOCUS!

Resolve to tap into the power of concentrated, focused effort. You can't build momentum in your practice if you're spreading yourself too thin. Start by reading *The ONE Thing* by Gary Keller, *The Compound Effect* by Darren Hardy, and *The Slight Edge* by Jeff Olson. Then conduct an 80/20 analysis. Identify the 20 percent of your activities that generate 80 percent of benefits. Once you've identified your "20", carve out one hour each day – preferably first thing in the morning – to work on your most productive, beneficial tasks. For some it might be writing an article. For others, forming relationships with influencers. If adhered to consistently, working in this disciplined manner will transform your practice.



Jay Harrington
CEO, Harrington

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

INVEST IN YOUR TEAM.

Commit to thinking more deeply about the assignment process, looking not only at who has the time or who has done it before, but also who needs to learn a particular task. Conduct project debriefs with team members, providing constructive and developmental feedback that highlights both strengths and areas for growth. Engage your developing lawyers and staff in strategic planning as well as client development and relations efforts. When hiring, look more closely at experience, attitude, commitment to achieve, and ability to innovate than at their grades. Thank people for their efforts and truly appreciate the full team of people who make it possible for you to run a successful practice. Only when you have a highly skilled, engaged, and committed team can you build a vibrant successful practice.



Susan G. Manch
Chief of People & Development
Norton Rose Fulbright US LLP

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KNOW YOUR CLIENTS.

Be more in touch with your clients, personally, regarding their business challenges and especially concerning their legal needs. Get regular news updates (Manzama and Google alerts, for example) about your most important clients. Conduct regular face-to-face “relationship reviews” to deepen your firm’s connections with key clients. Arrange third-party surveys to objectively ascertain what you’re doing right and wrong, and what you can learn from other firms. And never ask any client any question unless you are committed to promptly following up — even if you don’t have a good answer — on their response.



Mark T. Greene
Strategy and Marketing
Consultant
Mark T. Greene Consulting

WE
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RESOLVED:

HONOR YOUR BRAND NOT IN THE BREACH BUT IN PRACTICE.

Match the communication of your brand in your website, collateral materials and all other communications with your behavior so all actions match your brand promise. Do not settle for sloppy brand implementation or third-rate materials because they are cheap. Your brand will inspire your mission and your troops — all your troops, not just the lawyers but your staff and clients and prospects because they will all demand that you live the brand. This is not a campaign promise to be jettisoned as soon as it becomes inconvenient. This is a business and life stance.



Burkey Belser
President & Creative Director
Greenfield Belser



CAST A WIDE NET.

Enhance the company you keep, and enlarge your circle of influential peers. Take your focus off websites and publications and re-set your attention towards people. Get to know other professionals who write books, magazines and blogs. Get to know the academic who publishes relevant research on SSRN, and identify those individuals who sit on editorial boards at key industry publications. If there's an article in the local newspaper that fits your practice or interest, document that name and the journalist's contact information. Then build spreadsheets, sign up for email alerts, and create Twitter lists to track – and more importantly, engage with – these people and their writing going forward!



Steve Matthews
Stem Legal Web Enterprises Inc.

WE MIGHT RE SOL VED:

STAY IN BALANCE.

Use an old-fashioned to-do list (yup, a legal pad) with four quadrants to a page: **Top Left:** Immediate work for clients (draft contracts, file motions, etc.). **Lower Left:** Short-term business development tasks (make phone calls, set up meetings, etc.). **Top Right:** Long-term business development ideas (column topics, marketing plans, etc.). **Lower Right:** Personal to-dos (pharmacy, insurance quote, etc.). The point of having these all on one page is that they are ALL important. Focusing solely on client work causes the other quadrants to suffer. Getting your personal stuff done keeps you sane and creates room in your brain for high-level thinking. Keep the sheet active during the week, crossing off completed items and adding more as needed. It's a handy visual reminder to show you what you are focusing on, and if there's an imbalance, where more time needs to be spent.



Susan Kostal
Legal affairs, PR, marketing
and business development
consultant

WE MIND ARE RESOLVED: VED:

BE CALM AND CENTERED.

Develop a mindfulness meditation practice. Mindfulness is talked about a lot, and for good reason. Taking a few minutes each day to sit quietly and intentionally focus your mind on your breathing positively affects every part of your life, personal and professional. What other practice provides such big returns on the small amount of time invested? As little as five minutes a day will help you develop control over your thoughts so they don't carry you away throughout your day. Mindfulness meditation is not so much about what happens during the meditation, but how it prepares you to successfully handle your life after your meditation. Take a little time in the morning, each morning, to calm, center, and focus your mind, then reap the benefits all day long.



Jamie J. Spannhake
Partner
Berlandi Nussbaum
& Reitzas LLP

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

HONOR YOUR OWN HEART.

Let this year be the year you trust your gut and do what you want to do. Sure, you should listen to others, especially those who know something about the issue at hand – or who will be affected by it. But in 2017, having listened, trust yourself to make your own excellent decision when it is about you. Do that thing you always wanted to do, but never got around to, before it is too late. Take that trip that seemed too extravagant, but, come on, you know it isn't. Switch careers ... or ramp up this one with an investment in more education or a relocation. Whatever it is ... this year you get to have the last word on what is right for you.



Merrilyn Astin Tarlton
Partner/Catalyst
Attorney at Work

WE'RE SOLVED:

KNOW WHAT IS COMING.

Resolve not to be caught unaware of evolving technology and process innovations applicable to your legal practice. To that end, have a small internal team conduct ongoing research and report to firm leadership monthly. The research should include legal solutions provided by organizations that are neither law firms nor legal departments. The reports will be brief and intended to ensure your firm is never caught by surprise nor made to look ignorant if a client broaches specific solutions you could be deploying to their benefit. Firm leadership can decide how to keep all lawyers informed. This is not an idea but rather an action plan and should be treated as such. It is OK to sail into iceberg infested waters as long as at least one sailor is in the crow's nest



Gerry Riskin
Founding Partner
Edge International

WE MIGHT BE RESOLVED:

WORK SMARTER.

Read *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* by Cal Newport and implement some of his strategies into your practice. If nothing else, learn to block out time to be left alone to be productive, and your stress level will naturally decrease as you make deep and real progress in your work instead of remaining on the surface putting out fires.



Megan Zavieh
Zavieh Law

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So say we all.

Attorney at Work publishes “one really good idea every day” for enterprising lawyers, and is a member of the ABA Journal Blawg 100 Hall of Fame. Subscribe to get law practice tips daily at www.attorneyatwork.com.

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