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Cynthia Sharp, Esquire
Business Development Strategist

*Creating and Operating a Successful
Law Firm - An Interview with
Kerry Lavelle*

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CREATING AND OPERATING A SUCCESSFUL LAW FIRM - AN INTERVIEW WITH KERRY LAVELLE

By Cynthia Sharp, The Sharper Lawyer

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*Kerry M. Lavelle began his own practice, Lavelle Legal Services, in 1989, focusing primarily on matters of tax law. Today, the firm, now known as Lavelle Law, Ltd., has grown to include 22 attorneys with practice groups in tax, business law, commercial real estate, estate planning, criminal law, home health care, small business, gaming law, bankruptcy, corporate formation, family law, litigation, grocery law, employment law, residential real estate, securities, and LGBT law. He is the author of *The Business Guide to Law: Creating and Operating a Successful Law Firm*, published by the Division.*

What inspired you to write *The Business Guide to Law: Creating and Operating a Successful Law Firm*?

It was simply a matter of trying to pass along information to new attorneys and other existing attorneys who need business advice on how to run their law firms. As I say in a lot of my public speaking, I do not stand before anybody claiming to be the smartest person in the room, but I have made so many mistakes that I have corrected along the way and if my book can help other practitioners avoid the mistakes I've made, their trajectory to success will be accelerated. I really do enjoy talking about law practice management and hopefully, in the long run, the book will assist many practitioners in either starting a successful law firm or improving their already existing law practices.

Lastly, there are not many business centric books for decision makers in law firms. Everyone has an opinion on how to manage attorneys and how to manage a workload in a law office. But there is not a lot of good information available to lawyers on running the *business* that happens to be your law firm.

Why did you decide to submit a proposal to the ABA as opposed to another publisher? Did you consider self-publishing?

I really did not want to self-publish. It was the first book I've written, and I really didn't know what I didn't know. I felt much more comfortable going with a known publisher with a great reputation. This approach led me to one main source, the American Bar Association. I think it is the best resource for lawyers in the country. I am very excited to be a part of the ABA's team of authors.

What is the main advice that you would give to an attorney currently struggling to make a living in his or her practice?

Although there is no one magic "thing" that needs to happen to be successful, there are many elements to running a great law office. The first, obviously, is a great business development and marketing approach to obtaining good clients. Today it can be done very inexpensively with the use of social media. Second, getting clients to pay timely is the life blood of a law firm. Many attorneys who start their own practices are great technicians, that is, attorneys, but not many understand the time necessary to bring in clients through business development and then to prepare fair and accurate bills that clients will pay.

The last element of course is growing your practice, which is a commitment to systems, hiring the right people, and building a firm culture in which employees want to work hard and in which clients want to be apart.

Do you have suggestions for attorneys who want to write a book?

Yes, start with a general concept of the book and spend a few months building an extensive table of contents under which you will backfill content in a way that readers will enjoy reading. Then, once a good framework is developed for the book through an extensive table of contents, slowly begin to write substance for the book. Through this process the table of contents may change, be

altered, and certain sections might fit better in other chapters, but allow a minimum one year to write the book.

Do you have a work in progress now?

I do, and it's tentatively structured to assist first and second year associates assimilate into a law firm easily and come out of law school adding value as soon as reasonably possible in their new careers. It's basically being built as a very extensive training manual for new attorneys. I think it will have wide applicability to any new attorney in his or her first and second year of practice.

What do you do when you are not writing, speaking, or teaching?

My work day is built around practicing law! I'm still in the trenches and I love it immensely. Outside of work, my wife and I keep track of our four children who are either in college or just recently graduated and starting out in the work world. Lastly, during the summertime in the Midwest, the probability is high that you will catch me on a golf course on Friday afternoon or during the weekend.

[Cynthia Sharp](#)

Business development leader and veteran attorney Cynthia Sharp, Esq., works with motivated lawyers seeking to generate additional revenue for their law firms. The business development strategies and skill sets that she shares were developed and tested over a period of 30 years in practice and are constantly refined to reflect modern marketing techniques. For additional information about business development issues, check out thesharperlady.com.