



ILLINOIS STATE  
BAR ASSOCIATION

# THE BOTTOM LINE

The newsletter of the ISBA's Section on Law Office Economics

## Improving the economics of your law practice: Quick tips for daily use

By Carl R. Draper, of Feldman, Wasser, Draper & Benson in Springfield, Illinois

**E**ditor's Note: The General Practice Section presented its annual update at the ISBA Midyear meeting in Chicago. The program included a presentation of "30 Tips in 30 Minutes—Improving the Economics of Your Law Practice." This article was prepared from that presentation by Carl R. Draper, past chair of the Law Office Economics Section Council.

### Data and information management

1. Information Management Overruns Practice.  
We live in a world that requires more discovery, more research, more deadlines, more rules and more information to manage. Learn to manage the information before it overwhelms you.
2. Keep it Simple—Sometimes less is more.  
Organization is a tool to help save, retrieve and archive information. Make it easy to use.

3. Protect the Equipment and Data.
  - a. Backups are a vital part of information technology. Learn it; use it; test it.
  - b. Virus protection & Adware are must software. Buy it and keep it up to date.
4. Organize the Data.
  - a. Use your own organizing system. There is nothing wrong with simple systems. Alphabetic organization is fine. Use the same systems for paper and digital files.
  - b. Use document management software or individual client folders. Keep a folder for each client and a subfolder for each matter.
  - c. Keep information up-to-date and at your fingertips. Keep computer files on the network server or on a single shared drive. Delete "drafts" that you don't want. Keep the same digital files as paper ones so that you can access information from your desk.
5. Start scanning; Organize e-filings; Save e-mails. Store these with other client documents.
  - a. Manage the technology - Let it serve you.
    - i. Every device has an "OFF" switch - use it.
    - ii. Buy only what helps. Don't be tempted to buy more computers, digital organizers or cell phone gadgets than you will actually use. Many of these are helpful, but there is nothing wrong with paper organizers.
  - b. Don't let technology waste time

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- (games, shopping, and other Internet temptations).
- c. Get the training for lawyers and staff. Most software is wasted due to the lack of training to learn the efficiencies that the computer program promised.

### Economic factors that make the bottom line

6. Sure there is competition, but set a professional fee. Fair fees do not mean cheap legal work. Being the "cheapest" lawyer in town is nothing to be proud of.
  - a. Why are some lawyers doing \$350 bankruptcies and \$60 deeds and green sheets for title companies?
  - b. What is so good about hourly fees? There are risks, but fixed fees often make sense. How about a fixed fee with a "bonus" fee for a good result (subject to ethical limitations for some areas of law)?
  - c. Study your profitability and focus on areas of profit. Too many lawyers work on "marginal" cases out of a fear of running out of work. Work on the kind of cases you enjoy and are best at. Develop that as your focal practice area.
  - d. Market your VALUE not your FEE. Clients will pay for what they perceive as valuable service. They see little value in hours spent.
7. Marketing: Is a Yellow Pages ad really complete marketing plan? There has to be a better way. Have you

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studied what you pay for “Yellow Pages”? Is it generating a profit? Do you keep track of the sources of new clients? Invest your marketing money and efforts at the sources that produce best. Remember to maintain professional friendships and to thank those who refer clients.

8. Cross market to existing clients. After a divorce or real estate closing, suggest a new Will. Make sure clients know ALL of the areas of your practice.
9. Manage your time.
  - a. Schedule time to work quietly.
  - b. Schedule time with assistants and associates.
  - c. Schedule time for returning phone calls.
  - d. Keep accurate time and task records.
  - e. Send bills promptly.
  - f. Do client work on time, return calls, meet deadlines.
  - g. Stop working for non-paying clients. Non-paying clients can be demanding of your time. It may be better to withdraw and devote more time to the paying matters.
10. Delegate work
  - a. Quit spending \$200 - \$300 time doing a \$40 task. It is easy to fall prey to chores that are not billable, legal services.
  - b. Train and trust your legal assis-

- tant. Make every employee feel like a part of the team.
- c. Have staff gather and update client and case information to have at your fingertips.
- d. Bill for your legal assistant work when appropriate.
- e. Use your computer and network.
  - i. Keep information at hand.
  - ii. Stay at your desk. If you have the information you need at your desk, you can get more done and make more money for your time.

### Manage your clients and matters

11. Success is more likely for the attorney who is organized and pushing the matter forward.
  - a. Repeated status calls.
  - b. Timely work leads to better collection.
  - c. Some cases are faster to try than to settle.
  - d. Use practice management software.
    - i. Docket / Calendar
    - ii. Time / Billing
    - iii. Document assembly and organization
12. Analyze client goals and set realistic expectations.
  - a. In litigation lawyers want to “Win” but clients may want something more practical.

- b. In transactions, clients focus on the end result more than the details.
- c. Get matters concluded promptly.
- d. Create daily and long-term “To - Do” lists.
  - i. Daily must do items.
  - ii. Drop or postpone distractions.
  - iii. After any client task, add the next step to the list.

### Manage your personal life

13. Schedule vacations and take them. This does not include a briefcase of work.
14. Stay active with family, friends and community.
15. Watch for “burn out.” The Lawyers Assistance Program is happy to help if needed. They are also happier when lawyers manage stress with better organization and healthy use of assistance from partners, staff, family and friends.

### Conclusion: Find satisfaction in your practice and prosper

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## Social events—Planning the small office party

By Jeffrey A. Rouhandeh of Caldwell, Berner & Caldwell in Woodstock, Illinois

The holidays are past! The New Year dawns and it's time to get back to work. One last niggling thought for 2004, though; how did the office year-end party go? Was it a success? In a cost comparison between the entertainment and food expense with percentage of ‘good will’ restored, did the latter surpass the former? If it was successful, does someone get the credit; and if it was another fiasco, is there no one to blame?

There is an obscure but well-intentioned psychology behind the office party beyond mere tokenism from management to staff. The practice of law is stressful: relations with staff and between partners and associates are

subject to daily onslaught of legal deadlines, courtroom drama and harsh repercussions. The question is whether any real purpose can be served by spending more time with these same people and dedicating a few hours to shoring up the ‘walls of civility’ that one inadvertently or otherwise, spent approximately 254 days tearing down.

The answer is “yes,” if we accept the fact that merely wishing for *auld lang syne*, won't make it so. If the 2005 overview of last year's social event is rife with criticism and anecdotal observations of social faux pas, the party wasn't worth the expense and the firm will be paying long-term in loss of morale and unity. Successful ‘cost-effec-

tive’ social events should foster unity, a common purpose, and even pride in the firm, while unsuccessful events even in a small office are divisive along economic, gender and age lines.

Personal relationships with family and friends require time and effort to create and maintain. Professional relationships get less time but require more forethought and concerted effort to build and maintain. Absent a psychology degree, whether they volunteered for the position or ‘got stuck with it,’ planners of small office social events need a primer on ‘how to avoid the pitfalls, whirlpools and undertows of the office party.’

In a small firm where everyone

knows day-to-day everyone else's business, it's an easy mistake to group individuals together and make unilateral decisions out of habit. If the tradition has been for a casual in-house party where the same clique of people subdivide, the planner can consider making arrangements at a public restaurant with a similar casual atmosphere. Removing all parties from the home turf places everyone on even footing with no one person—newly hired versus near-retirement—having an advantage.

Planners in a small firm should take the demographics of staff into consideration: young singles may relish the night life and take an evening social event in their stride, while married personnel with children may have a hard time finding an available baby sitter and regret the additional expense. In planning a social event you don't want to create a schism. Closing the office early and hosting the event during regular office hours may be a great solution.

If sitting around a table of food and beverage and just talking with the 'same old' people isn't anybody's idea of festivities, group participation at an organized event will get everybody into an outgoing social mode. Holiday 'white elephant' gift exchanges and all the permutations of an 'exchange' are another way to level the field among

staff and attorneys since everyone gets a chance to laugh at themselves and their co-workers at no expense. Doing something different with the same people can provide a different perspective of everybody's particular foibles as well as appreciation of their individual strengths.

If turn-over of personnel is low, year-after-year the same scapegoats usually emerge at the annual party and such character assassinations become toxic to the firm in the long run. Whether the light, casual atmosphere provided by the social event remains 'light' depends on the makeup of the personalities involved. An observation that may begin in a light, bantering tone may turn into a free-for-all character assassination similar to the current television reality shows. The planner in charge needs to reshuffle the group dynamics to prevent that annual holiday 'bash.' If you're uncomfortable in formally designating a host, you should designate a 'ghost' to do the same thing.

This is where the analogy of a canoe trip is useful. You don't paddle the canoe filled with passengers to the middle of the river, pull up your oars and sit back secure in the knowledge that at some point you'll get downstream. The manner in which you get down stream and the shape you're in

when you get there can't be left to the current. Someone has to have an oar in the water to facilitate and guide the canoe down the current to the shore. Everyone then has a good time and wants to do it again. Carrying the analogy further, a bath in a cold stream with scrapes and a bruise from 'upfront and personal' contact with the river bed is nobody's idea of entertainment. Everyone should come away from an office social event in anticipation—not dread—of the next one.

It's very important to remember that unless the party is an award banquet or other socially significant event, it should be relaxing. This is a chance to mingle with people you may see everyday but with whom you don't work directly. While it's true that musical chairs at a formal dinner table isn't advisable because it upsets the waitress who just got everybody's dinner order figured out—not to mention what it does to used place settings and water glasses, a buffet arrangement is perfect to facilitate just the kind of mingling that's comfortable for everyone. Each person is responsible for his own dinnerware and is free and expected to get up, move around, or stay situated as they wish. And finally, remember to have fun—at no one's expense. You'll be seeing them again on Monday.

## Law firm planning & design: Part 2

By Daniel G. Jay, AIA; Christner, Inc.; St. Louis

**E**ditor's note: This is Part 2 of a three-part article designed to help attorneys in planning and designing their law firms.

### 2. In the Grip of the Lease

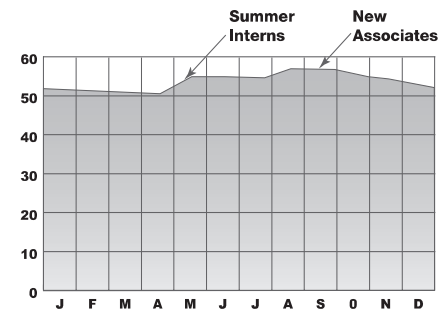
The current economic and legal structure of commercial real estate works against serving customers' most basic interests. The customer seeks basic office accommodation in a space that can grow and shrink and reconfigure with the demands of the business. The market responds with a product that requires five to 10-year commitments to a specific floor area, and construction of a tenant suite that requires seven trades to move a partition.

This affects law firms as it does most other businesses. Law firms grow and shrink in response to market conditions.

Unlike other businesses, however, law firms require significant tenant finish investment to provide competitive accommodations for their professional staff, and the appropriate image to clients.

Traditionally, law firms have responded by seeking a planning pattern that allows maximum flexibility on the perimeter of the building, reserved for lawyers, offering the ability to relocate lawyers as departments and practice groups expand and contract. The planning pattern is updated, but generally repeated on expansion floors, if contiguous expansion is possible. If it is not, the growing firm becomes fractured between different parts of the same building and, sometimes, even in different buildings.

Contraction brings similar challenges, as firms sub-lease parts of floors



to small legal practices, incubating companies, or other entities, in the hope of recovering parts of their leasehold commitments.

In truth, law firms have a seasonal growth and contraction pattern determined by a rate of gradual attrition countered by a seasonal influx of young lawyers. May triggers the arrival of sum-



mer interns, and September the arrival of the new class of associates.

Interior support areas are moved, compressed, renovated and reorganized repeatedly during the course of the lease. Over the last decade libraries have been downsized, litigation support suites have been expanded, and many firms have experienced huge growth in technology-related support professionals.

But once the lease is signed problems can plague the tenant, who can feel cornered by lack of negotiating room, ground that is particularly uncomfortable for attorneys. The hold of the lease is difficult for the growing, energetic practice. The lease also represents a liability for the firm seeking to merge with a larger firm into consolidated facilities.

**Timing and Negotiation**

The negotiating position of a tenant increases inversely with the reducing term of the lease. While in some rare conditions the landlord no longer wants the tenant, most landlords will value a healthy law practice as a credit-worthy tenant. That being the case, the tenant will experience preliminary lease extension offers from their landlord up to two years before lease term. If the lease has built-in renewal terms and options, the landlord will attempt to extend the term early. If none exist then the landlord will want to pre-empt a competitive process by offering terms early. This overture represents the first signs of tenant empowerment, and the opportunity should not be squandered.

We frequently find that the landlord's timing drives the process at this early stage. Two years prior to term a tenant cannot yet credibly negotiate for space that is vacant and waiting for a tenant, because the market remains hopeful that empty space will be absorbed faster than two years. Other property landlords turn an indifferent eye on the tenant until the potential move becomes more imminent. Early negotiation usually occurs at the landlord's advantage, unless the tenant can effectively leverage what the landlord wants most of all: continued valuation of the building based on future cash flow commitments.

Ideally the stars will align to allow several options to be available between 18 and 10 months before term, including the option of renewal. This requires some open-mindedness on the part of the tenant as to location and work environment. Our ideal 18-month process for the mid-sized firm allows for seven months of comparative shopping, two months of negotiation, four months of design, one

month of construction bidding, and five months of interior construction depending, of course, on the size and complexity of the suite. We have experienced this entire process compressed to five months.

A large law firm can become an anchor tenant for a new construction project. Law firms rarely seek to "name" a building, and this strategy we believe to be quite rare, driven by the difficulty of finding large tracts of contiguous floor space in the available options. The design and construction of a new building can take between 10 and 36 months, usually requiring the tenant to commit quite early. It is, generally, more difficult to leverage the market if the firm is anchoring a new building project, because of the need to commit before the market is otherwise ready to bid and negotiate.

The exception is the firm that finds itself to be the large fish in a small pond. If the market will not offer a competitive option of a quarter to half a million square feet of contiguous space, then the firm will have to create one. In an expanding real-estate market this is easily done; developers will jump at the opportunity to catch a tenant of this magnitude. In a shrinking market, it will be more difficult. Firms should be aware, however, that this process should begin no less than four years before lease renewal, and might lead to an early negotiated extension of the existing lease.

The most frequent outcome is lease renewal, which might or might not involve major reconstruction. Any extensive reconstruction will require complex phasing and disruptive relocations. In approaching such a strategy, we strongly recommend that larger firms seek contiguous empty floor space to facilitate the reconstruction.

In a lease renewal scenario, the firm that has explored the market has a significant advantage. Test fits will identify the design features of the current firm that

**The Bottom Line**

Published at least four times per year.

Annual subscription rate for ISBA members: \$20.

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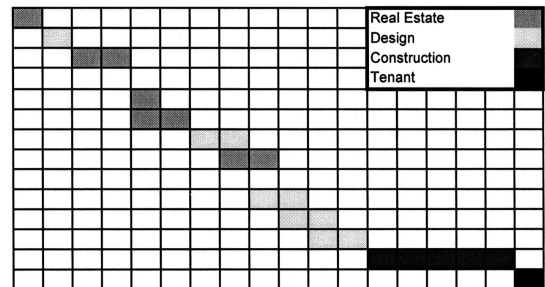
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**Months to lease termination: 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1**

**Initial Discussions with Landlord**

- Request for "Best offer"
- Physical Planning/Pricing
- Negotiation
- Market Search**
- Develop Requirements & RFP
- Short list identified
- Test Fit/Pricing
- Final Negotiations
- Design**
- Schematic Design
- Design Development
- Construction Documents
- Construction**
- Move-in



would be provided if starting with a clean unfinished floor. We have frequently found ways to creatively incorporate these new features into the renovated firm, to the delight of the clients.

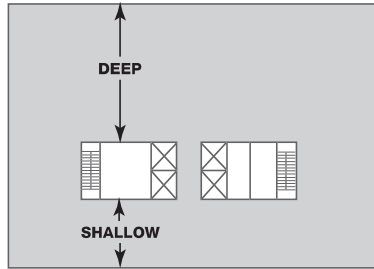
## Characteristics of the Good Law Practice Building

The ideal law building would rotate, allowing no view preference to any side of the floor. We have yet to see this done, but it underscores the point: good law buildings have equivalent views in all directions, allowing the distribution of attorneys and practice groups without internal battles about preferred views.

Generally, the larger the floor plate the less perimeter glass per rentable square foot. In simplistic terms, the perimeter glass represents the revenue-producing part of the suite. The ratio derived from comparing the linear feet of glass to rentable square feet goes down as the floor expands. As floor plate examples C and D illustrate below, the ratio is also affected by the proportions of the floor plate: as the plate gets longer and thinner, it gains more glass.

As firms get larger a small floor plate can prove to be another kind of liability, spreading a firm over many floors of a building. Anticipating a target square foot per attorney (600-800) will establish the number of attorneys per floor. In general, floor plates between 18,000 and 24,000 sq. ft. offer the best combination of access to glass, and achieve a critical mass of lawyers per floor. Suburban developments offer large floor plates that are a series of connected buildings. While these are rarely found in downtown settings, they can offer an interesting option for much larger firms.

A final feature of the floor plate is the ability to gain meaningful interior core space for support functions. On smaller floor plates it is particularly important to have an offset core that captures a deeper dimension on one side for internal



support areas.

Commercial office buildings are typically designed to a grid. This grid affects ceiling systems, including lighting, sprinklers, and HVAC systems, and is usually defined by the window mullion placement.

A four-foot mullion is common, but will affect the layout profoundly: an eight-foot wide office is too small, while a 12-foot wide office is excellent. A two-tiered office size would suggest 12 and 16-foot wide offices.

This will be less efficient than the five-foot grid that allows a 10-foot and a 15-foot office. Firms going to a universal office size of about 180 sq. ft. can be very well served by the four-foot grid, and not as efficiently by the five-foot grid.

Additional characteristics of the building need to be mentioned: the building should offer contiguous growth capability for the firm in the form of an expansion path that can be preserved without incurring significant cost.

Location is always the most controversial of the site selection issues. Traditionally, law firms have located in downtown business and finance centers, close to the courts. This pattern continues, but a few rogue firms are following corporate clients to the suburbs. Three factors should be weighed:

1. Access to clients, rarely a critical concern.
2. Access to resources including lawyers and the courts.
3. Cost.

In the end it may be lawyer convenience that has the most compelling influence on site selection.

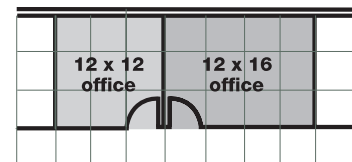
## Negotiating Flexibility

Most firms recognize the need for flexibility and negotiate an expansion path into their lease. The desired path is into contiguous space. Growing upward has its advantages in persuading practice groups to relocate.

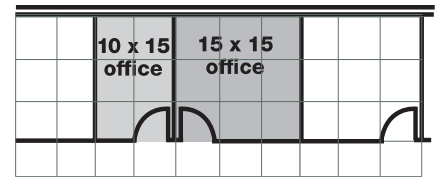
While it is normal practice for a firm to negotiate options on expansion space, it is less typical to seek exit options. The option of exiting the entire suite before lease termination is likely to carry significant penalties. The option to give back 20 percent to 30 percent of the space at the lease mid-point can offer the opportunity to gain significant financial relief, or alternatively ease future merger negotiations. Downsizing terms are not always attractive, but if needed, they are better than the option of carrying unused space.

## Interim Strategies

With three to four years remaining on existing leases, office space can require interim improvements to accommodate changes in the practice. Our experience is that the most typical changes result from a shortage of lawyer offices, but can also stem from expansion of support service departments or the need for additional record storage.



4' Grid



5' Grid

The firm seeks low-cost solutions that will not compromise their negotiating strength at renewal time.

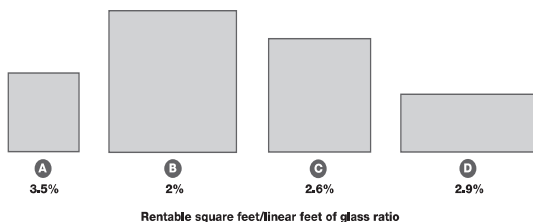
The most typical strategy is taking additional space in an "as-is" condition. This can often be the lowest first cost, but the future difficulty will be vacating the space for renovation if it becomes a permanent part of the suite.

If the expansion space is occupied by lawyers, then the practice is being fragmented into a range of different spaces and environments. If possible, we recommend maintaining and increasing the density of lawyers in the suite and moving administrative and workroom/record storage functions.

## 3. Image and Culture

### Silk Stocking to Nike "Swoosh"

As baby-boomers age, they are meeting important clients and highly accom-



| Floor Plate  | Perimeter       | Gross RSF | Ratio |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------|-------|
| A: 110 x 110 | 440 linear feet | 12,100    | 3.6%  |
| B: 200 x 200 | 800 linear feet | 40,000    | 2%    |
| C: 150 x 150 | 600 linear feet | 22,500    | 2.6%  |
| D: 100 x 220 | 640 linear feet | 22,000    | 2.9%  |

plished professionals who are 15 years younger. Both our profession and our clients appear to attract younger and younger talent. It is important to recognize what is different about the new generations and what is the same.

These generational comparisons are particularly important in defining the desired image of the firm. Whether or not we are younger, we think younger, and that manifests itself in many different ways. The firm that appears to be grounded in its own 19th century image and culture will not necessarily attract the ambitious, entrepreneurial attorney or client. Some clients are embedded in entrepreneurial culture, and seek that in their lawyers. Others are seeking the image of an establishment firm. Somewhere between the silk stocking and the Nike "swoosh" is a message and culture that will best suit the aspirations of the firm.

An interesting clue can be found in the decisions leading to the design of the firm's Web site. The bulletin board nature of the Web site allows the crafting of a very focused message, usually stressing the extraordinary skills and knowledge of the professional staff, and the range of services that they offer. Different Web sites integrate the technology theme in different ways.

Ideally, the office design would have the same clarity of message, but architecture works far more subliminally, and cannot accommodate the visual complexity often found on a Web site. Subliminally, we wish to convey the experience and wisdom of the ages applied to the needs of today. Technology-laden conference rooms are replacing shelves of leather-bound books as the best conveyors of this message, and providing powerful communication capability at the same time.

In considering the issue of image, it is important to recognize that impressions happen. There is no neutral image. Making "no impression" is making a clear impression, though not necessarily a desirable one. Further, image needs to be integrated into skills, behavior and client experience. A high-tech image is quickly compromised if technology doesn't work. A customer-focused image is destroyed by a frustrating phone system.

### Starting with the End in Mind

As design practitioners we have learned that the right image and culture are achieved through a purposeful process, rather than an arbitrary imposition

of a designer's taste on a willing client. Be cautious of engaging the design firm whose work all bears the same aesthetic stamp. Your space should reflect your vision, not your designer's aspirations.

The process requires the designer to lead the client in a discussion of specific goals for image and culture. We use word searches and graphic exercises that teach the client to understand how they respond to space and how impressions are formed. A combination of surveys and workshops defines the specific targets. If client and lawyer impressions are the prime objective, ask how you would want the offices to be described by the client or lawyer. Such a question can be asked of the entire shareholding group. We then take the words and cluster and map them, so that each participant can see where they placed in the collective view. The outcome typically covers a broad range, but centers on a position that truly reflects cultural and image aspirations. Such an approach provides a specific performance goal for the designer, which can actually be tested after occupancy.

### Design Directions

The desired outcome should be used and strategically interpreted by the designer in such a way that it is made clear to the planning committee and the rest of the firm. The desired outcome remains the words used by the client to describe the firm. The design strategies developed to achieve that outcome should be clearly interpreted.

Image is conveyed by what we see, what we hear, and what we touch. We feel the quality of a car as much as we see it. The trend toward reception/conference centers allows designers to focus the look and feel into a smaller, defined zone within the office. Impressions are conveyed by materials, sequence of spaces, lighting, access to views and daylight, access to technology, and quality of human interaction.

Cost is a factor. Very few of our clients wish to appear extravagant, and yet the seamless access to services and features is a critical aspect of client accommodation and creating the desired impression. The term "cook fancy, eat plain" conveys the need for careful planning to achieve a simple, but perfectly crafted image.

### Art and Image

A final word should be offered about art, another extremely controversial aspect of office design. Many firms own a collection of art that has been deliber-

ately gathered and displayed over the years. It has, for better or worse, become an established aspect of the firm's visual image.

Our view is that art selection and display should be as purposefully planned as other aspects of the design. If the desired message is different from that conveyed by the existing artwork, then it should be changed. We frequently find fox hunts and clipper ships displayed in assertively contemporary interiors.

A budget of \$2 per sq. ft. for quality artwork is worth \$5 per sq. ft. of upgraded finishes. We strongly recommend the use of an outside professional artwork planner, rather than deferring to the internal art expert.

### Culture

Of greater significance than the art on the walls is the effect of the design on firm culture. Many professional firms in accounting and consulting are leaving the office space to work at their client offices, in their homes, or in hotels. As a consequence, their offices have become downsized touchdown environments. Law practice continues to preserve its distinction as an office-based activity, depending on the ongoing training, collaboration, and sharing that exists between professionals. The office design must capture this professional interaction and encourage it. A sense of isolation by a lawyer within a law firm defeats the value of the commute and accommodation.

Most interaction now takes place electronically, by e-mail and phone. This communication could be achieved by never leaving home, but personal interaction in the corridors, stairs, through the doors, over coffee, even in the rest room remains a highly valued asset, in part because of its spontaneous nature.

The practice neighborhood, described below, serves as the first tier of community; the learning, collaboration, and information sharing occurs most acutely at the practice group level. Within the context of a firm community of 500, the smaller practice groups can add the element of belonging and friendly environment that otherwise might not be achievable.

This neighborhood community should not be thought of as being in conflict with the larger firm community. Community builds wherever the firm design and policies allow it to grow. Firm-wide community is created



in those spaces where everybody goes: the conference centers, library, and lunchrooms. The lunchrooms, in particular, offer great, and mostly unrealized opportunities described further in this article.

### 4. Blocking and Planning

We frequently refer to the law firm as operating like a village, a metaphor that helps us to understand the distinctive zones within the office space. The most visible zone is the "courthouse square" which, like the reception/conference area, has wider streets, open spaces, and a generally welcoming presence. The visitor's impression of the village is established in the town square.

The industrial and main street zones also have wide, busy streets, designed to be accessible for people and materials. It is important to separate these areas from the rest of the firm.

The village neighborhood streets, like the perimeter office corridors, are quiet, familiar, and conducive to collaboration and sharing. The practice neighborhoods include access to the essential services that allow the practice group to serve as a firm within the firm.

Much of the success of the plan will be derived from the successful implementation of this zoning between areas. No lawyer's office should be across the hall from a lunchroom or service center. Increased security demands have driven the further isolation of the reception/conference areas.

#### Reception/Conference

In the 70s and 80s, there was a general preference for multiple reception/waiting areas. Current trends have centralized these functions and placed a limited number of reception/conference centers on strategically located floors. More typically, a single conference center serves the entire firm. The location is selected by its views, its address, and its access by the most lawyers, criteria that are frequently in conflict. Should the best views be chosen, the location will be the highest available floor. The result will be that the lowest floors will have not only the least desirable views, but be furthest from the conference center. To ease the pressure on assigning lawyers to the lower floors, we encourage locating the conference floor in the middle to lower half of the firm.

Note that security and confidentiality requirements have many firms restricting all visitors to the conference center,

with other floors blocked from elevator or corridor access by outsiders.

#### Corridors and Stairs

The experience of the firm will be defined by its corridors, where colleagues meet accidentally and share progress on certain matters or make lunch plans. Corridors are essential to the community of the firm, and as much as possible, they should be dynamic, open and occupied. For this reason we open secretaries to the corridors, and try to provide practice corridors no less than five feet in width.

As in the village, not all corridors are alike. Practice corridors should be quieter, and yet with the familiar faces of a residential neighborhood. Corridors linking conference rooms should be wide, with seating areas, phones, and artwork. Finally, the service corridors, particularly those serving the copy/mail functions, should be designed for carts, deliveries, staging and activity. Corridor intersections are an opportunity to address these zoning differences through creative transitions.

Stairs are frequently used as a dramatic component of the firm's reception area, sending a loud and clear message that the firm extends to many floors. We prefer to treat the stair in a more utilitarian way as an internal functional amenity. By connecting the critical internal support functions, the stair makes it easier to access lunchrooms, mail rooms, word processing, libraries, etc. This stair is a place for random meetings and exchanges that build the firm community, but should not be part of the visitor experience.

#### Neighborhoods & Practice Groups

The concept of the practice neighborhood has been one of the most powerful communicating concepts in our law firm planning experience. The concept speaks to the co-location of a group of collaborating attorneys, paralegals, and secretaries serviced by essential filing, equipment and meeting space. This model typically works best in the context of the "practice group." Of significance to the planning function is the extent to which the neighborhood concept defines the planning pattern: the universal pattern of space build-out that offers the greatest long-term flexibility. The neighborhood reflects the appropriate mix of staff, while its undetermined boundaries offer the greatest possible flexibility for ranges of practice group sizes.

In our experience most practice

groups can fit comfortably into the same pattern of neighborhood. This allows groups to be moved as required to accommodate growing departments and changes in the practice mix. Exceptions will be practice groups with unusual staff ratios, or groups with unusual needs. The greatest exception is typically the litigation group, which will require the litigation support facilities described below.

The neighborhood planning pattern will cover from 60 to 75 percent of the floor area. It deserves the most careful study and deliberation. Once established, it can be incorporated into expansion floors.

#### Administrative and Support Functions

High rent costs and the continued pressure to provide file and workspace for practice groups has resulted in development of administrative floors. Whereas many mid-sized firms have found it more expedient to place all administrative (non billable) staff in the inside of the floor plate, the growth of these functions with the firm's growth has required a range of different responses. Faced with the option of expanding to the perimeter—the "revenue" space—many firms relocated administrative functions to lower-cost space, typically in the same building.

The choices and decision regarding the location of these functions will be derived largely from the building geometry: a building with large inner core floor areas will allow for a comfortable distribution of support functions throughout the floor. As this inner core becomes too small to accommodate the functions, the concept of the administrative floor will become more attractive.

We often compare the administrative presence within the firm to that of a fine hotel. Hotel guests have on-demand self-service access to a range of services, but the administrative presence is largely invisible. The billing system, meanwhile, has the uncanny ability to get your mini-bar morning orange juice on your bill at checkout.

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March 2005  
Vol. 26, No. 3