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Free Falling: One Attorney's Decision to Go Solo

When I turned 20 years old I decided I needed to do some thing to rouse the relative calm in my life, so I flung my jump suit clad body out of a plane at 10,500 feet. The drop was exhilarating and then strangely serene once the parachute was pulled, and I sailed to the ground drinking in the astonishing scenery and blissful moment of solitude. My landing was surprisingly clumsy and heavy, but I landed on my feet, intensely proud of my flight.

Ten years later, when I turned 30, decided once again I needed to stir things up a little. All was to calm in both my family and professional life, so I took another plunge and decided to open my own law practice. This time I didn't need an airplane, but the ride has been just as exhilarating.

The moments of panic now are not much different from the moment the plane hatch opened ten years ago. As I desperately gripped the side of the plane while peering into the vast blue, I questioned my judgment to engage in such a hapless activity. Likewise, my decision to go solo vacillated between clinging onto the familiar and yearning to explore the unknown. Again, I slowly released my white knuckled grip better equipped for the invigorating and jarring ride that I was sure would follow. What I did not expect were the equally prevalent moments of serenity and satisfaction that likewise transpired as I began this expedition.

My moments of utter panic always have a similar theme; my singular ability to manage all business functions of my office, specifically the accounting aspect, and my ability to bring in clients so that I can somehow manage to keep the lights on in my house. On the other hand, the moments of gratification occurred unexpectedly and during simple moments; overhearing the receptionist answer my phone; driving by my office on the day the new sign is erected; noticing that my file cabinets are no longer filled with office supplies but rather with files; and perhaps, most importantly, realizing that I can go to the Halloween parade at my son's school this year. Seemingly small moments like those eased my doubt, hesitation, and apprehension.

When announcing my decision to go solo, I was met with varying responses. Most people were supportive; however, I did hear a few comments infected with doubt and reservation similar to the comment I heard ten years ago: "What if the parachute doesn't open?" Risk is an unavoidable component to going solo. As a prior adrenaline fanatic, I suppose it was the closest thing I could do to nurture that part of my character, since skydiving and bungee jumping were blacklisted from my repertoire of leisurely activities following my son's birth. I remind myself every day that I am not the first person to take this plunge. Many have done it before me. Many will do it after me. Some will succeed brilliantly. Some will falter disappointingly. But all will have experienced the

same initial trepidation and elation and I am sure all would have regretted it immensely had they not taken the risk.

It has now been a year since I opened my doors. Business has been frerued at times and sluggish on occasion, but relatively constant. There have been moments when my heart palpitated from the anxiety of trying to do it all. I reluctantly admit that I have had to call opposing counsel on the morning of court to plead with him to mark his motion off because my son's daycare was closed due to snow. There have been Friday nights hunched over my desk until 11:00 p.m. so that I could catch up on all that was not accomplished the previous week. There have been Sunday mornings spent standing at the copy machine preparing a client's voluminous discovery compliance. There have been moments of eerie silence when it seemed like my office phones would never ring again and moments of complete cacophony when all were ringing at the same time.

One year ago, I gratefully took on every new client who sat across from my new cherry desk because I feared they could be my last for some time. One year later, I now consider each client and their case before I slide the retainer agreement across my desk. I know that when a client says they do not have the funds to pay a retainer fee but can make periodic payments, it usually means that they do not have the funds to make periodic payments either. Nevertheless, I continue to occasionally take on these cases because either I am a slow learner or an eternal optimist.

As a solo practitioner, life can no longer be compartmentalized into "work" life and "personal" life, but rather these two spheres melt into one another. My son has occupied himself on a Saturday afternoon by plucking the leaves from the plant in my office while I accomplished end-of-the-month billing. Conversely I, have stood in the cereal aisle of the supermarket typing on my BlackBerry® in response to a potential new client's consultation inquiry.

This adventure has been an exhilarating launch with perhaps some clumsy landings along the way; however, I am reminding myself everyday to relish the small accomplishments and enjoy the flight.

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