



Linda E. Wasielewski

Linda E. Wasielewski, P.L.C., *attorney & mediator*

I initially became a business owner more by necessity than by choice. After having worked in the metro Detroit area for many years as a government attorney, I had moved my family to Traverse City to work in a law firm with another attorney. After about 9 months, it was clear that this was not a good fit due to a difference in our personalities and approaches to the practice of law.

I had to make a living and moving back to Metro Detroit was not an economically feasible alternative - so I hung out my own shingle. Working as a solo practice attorney, at the time, was the very last thing that I would have chosen. It was so difficult at first, I really didn't know many people and had no idea how to set up and succeed at being my own boss.

Now 12 years later, through ups and downs, it is clear that this was a good choice for me. It has provided me with a real sense of pride in what I have developed - all on my own. It has been incredibly hard work and has come with plenty of costs - but it has developed real pride and self confidence.

I have to admit that I wasn't prepared for business ownership. For most professionals - lawyers, doctors, dentists, vets, ... the nuts and bolts taught in professional school are how to do the profession - in other words lawyers are taught how to argue motions and introduce evidence, doctors are taught how to treat disease, dentist how to fix teeth. We are not taught how to run the business; how to attract clients, keep clients, or hire personnel. So the

actual operation of this business as a business has been a real learning experience for me.

One of the most difficult aspects of being self employed for me has been the ups and downs - either being too busy or not busy enough. Whenever the phone doesn't ring for a day an irrational fear sets in that "this is it! - they have stopped calling!" This is a fairly common fear of the self-employed.

What I have enjoyed the most is the flexibility that a solo practice has afforded me. I have been able to raise my children and go to their events without worrying about what others think or how it will affect my job tract. I didn't have to say "no" to going to school events or helping out. I was able to really participate in the lives of my children in a really meaningful way. Yes, there were nights when I was burning the midnight oil on my laptop because I had spent the afternoon at the school with my son or daughter. This is an option that many of my fellow attorneys at the big firms didn't have.

I have also enjoyed being able to work with the clients that I want to serve, even if they might not fit what a big firm would look for. I have enjoyed getting to know my clients and being a part of their joys and sorrows.

I have been surprised by how much effort is required to attract clients - to keep my name out there. Initially, I thought that once you get your name out there - you sit back and do the legal work. It just doesn't work that way - it is a constant effort. It is a real juggling act - time for keeping up with your professional advancements, marketing, networking and doing the work.

The up side of this is that while it was foreign to me, the networking has provided me the opportunity to meet so many people in this region. It is amazing the number of people that I have gotten to know in Northern Michigan - it is overwhelming.

I am kept motivated by the challenges of the 21st century. This is not our parents' era - we don't work until age 55 or 60 and then sit back and collect

a pension and social security. With the increase in our expected longevity - we will work longer - which means that we are constantly reinventing ourselves and our businesses to meet the needs of an ever changing society. I know that what I do today and the clients that I serve may very well change over the next 10 years - while I will be practicing law, it may be that the focus of my practice may change to meet the needs presented by our region. I am also motivated to be a really positive role model for my children who are just getting out of college. I want them to see a person who is strong and vital and interesting - well beyond the traditional retirement age.

All in all, this whole journey has provided me with a real growth opportunity. I have found that I am tougher, more resourceful, and more resilient than I ever thought. I am proud of how I have developed and grown. I am optimistic about my future.