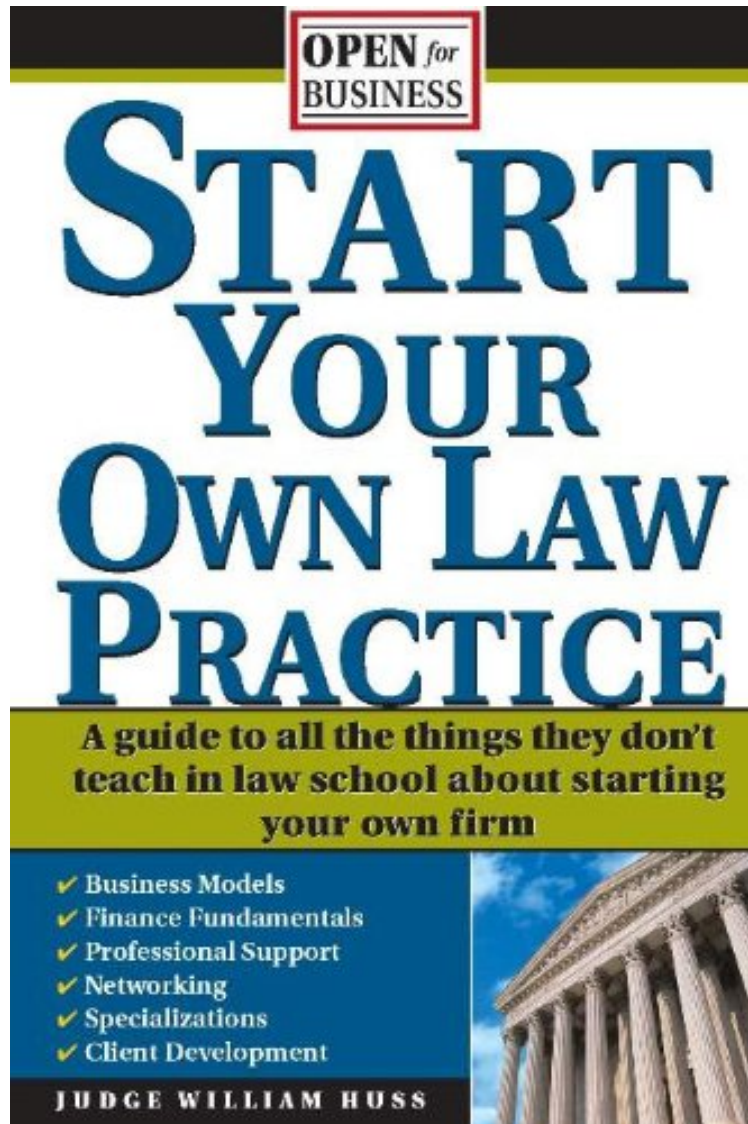


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## **Start Your Own Law Practice: A Guide to All the Things They Don't Teach in Law School about Starting Your Own Firm (Open for Business)**

*Judge William Huss*

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After years of school and maybe even after some years of practice, you are ready to be the boss. You want to hang out your shingle and open an office of your own. But running a profitable business takes more than just being a great attorney. Start Your Own Law Practice provides you with the knowledge to be both a great lawyer and successful business owner. Whether you are looking to open a sole practitioner's office or wanting to go into partnership with other colleagues, picking the right location, hiring the right support staff and taking care of all the finances are not easy tasks. With help from Start Your Own Law Practice, you can be sure you are making the best decisions for success. Don't let a wrong choice slow down your progress. Find advice on: Creating a Business Plan Managing the Office Raising Capital Billing and Fees Marketing Your Firm Building a Client Base Preventing Malpractice Suits Keeping an Eye on the Goal With checklists, sample letters and law office forms, Start Your Own Law Practice teaches you all the things they didn't in law school and gives you the confidence to go out and do it on your own.

About the Author Judge William Huss is a full-time mediator and arbitrator, overseeing individual, institutional, and corporate cases. He was named one of the Master Mediators by Verdict Magazine. Judge Huss was on the Los Angeles Superior Court, presiding over both civil and criminal trials. He also served on the Los Angeles Superior Court Executive Committee and was the Chair of the Education Subcommittee. He was a cofounder of an Alternative Dispute Resolution company and served as its president from 1996ndash;2001. He has successfully conducted over 2,800 mediations on the subjects of construction, business, employment, personal injury, eminent domain, malpractice, real estate, homeowners association, and many others. Before becoming a judge, he founded a law firm in downtown Los Angeles, and he is now of counsel to the firm. Having been an associate and partner in small, medium, and large firms, as well as founding one himself, Judge Huss is well-qualified to share insights and experiences that will benefit lawyers who want to start a law firm themselves. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. How to Practice Law from Your Home Excerpted from Start Your Own Law Practice by William Huss copy; 2005 The first thing learned by a lawyer working for a firm is the billable hour. It is the standard for the legal profession, and many firms require a minimum of between 2000 and 2500 billable hours annually. The time that the young lawyer has for family, pro bono work, and community activities is severely limited-if there is any time for those activities at all. This kind of pressure for billing is not limited to beginning associates-it also can affect junior partners and senior partners in large firms, particularly in metropolitan areas. This motivates a lot of practitioners to look for alternatives to the minimum billable hour mandate. One of those alternatives is to have your office in your home. This is quite often a very good alternative in a small town or even in a small city. This kind of alternative is available even in large, metropolitan areas, although very rare. The difference between the small town and the other locations is often perception. In a large city, the competition is usually in an office building, which has the effect on clients of projecting the image that the lawyer with a home office is outside the norm, and is possibly struggling to succeed. A potential client may seek someone who is perceived to be more successful. On the other hand, having your law practice in your home can be extremely valuable to those clients who want to have an on-going, personal relationship with their lawyer. This can occur even in the business world, where general counsel and other executives in the company feel comfortable with their lawyer having a close relationship with them and a hands-on knowledge of the client's company or business. THE HOME OFFICE ADVANTAGE It has been estimated that of the approximately one million lawyers in the United States, about 40% would rather be doing something other than practicing law. This level of dissatisfaction cannot be attributed to the stresses of the billable hour alone, but such stresses are a major factor in the dissatisfaction expressed by many lawyers. One way to reduce these stresses is to have your practice in your home. This way, you can personalize your relationship with clients and have more time for activities outside of the practice, creating a higher level of satisfaction for you as an individual. As more and more businesses use alternative work locations and incorporate them into their daily practices, the greater the general acceptance will be. It has been estimated that almost thirty-eight million people work out of their homes, and approximately ten million of those people work out of their homes full-time. Telecommuting is increasingly becoming a preferred style of conducting business. This will permit home-based offices to increase in business and in individual professions. THE HOME OFFICE CHALLENGES Starting your office in any of the locations discussed is a daunting task, and setting up an office in your home has its own set of challenges. The issue of separation of personal space from professional space is critical. The floor plan of your home must be compatible with accommodating an office space for you. There has to be the necessary security and privacy of client's files and information. Your clients have to know that their work is secure and not exposed to the casual prying eye of outsiders. Other challenges exist that are particularly specific to the home

office. One such challenge is the problem of zoning restrictions for the area where your home is located. Think of how embarrassing and costly it would be to change your office from your home to some other location because the neighbors complained to the authorities that you are in violation of a zoning restriction you failed to learn about. There are certain basic questions that you should consider before opening your office in your home:

- Are clients willing to accept your office in your home?
- Have you checked the zoning restrictions?
- Is it physically possible to separate the home area from the office area?
- Can you provide security and privacy for your workspace?
- Have you established a backup for when you are on vacation or otherwise engaged and need coverage for court?

Clearly, the physical location of your office can be critical to your law practice—especially when you are starting out. Your address and telephone number become identified with you by your clients and colleagues. It is important to consider how long you plan to be at a certain location, because you do not want to make too many changes. However, making changes can send signals to others, and you can take good advantage of them when promoting and marketing your law firm. For example, if you move from a firm of many lawyers to your home office, it can send the signal that you are not only starting your own law firm, but also that you are going to give very personal service, which most clients want from their attorney. On the other hand, if you move from your home office to an office building or to a firm with other lawyers, you may be indicating that you are moving up in the world and can give your clients broader services. If you stay in one location for a long time, you may be indicating that you are stable and reliable, which is also very good for your clients. Whatever you do in your law practice, location is an important aspect of your marketing. Perception of you by others can become the reality of their view of you, so work carefully on what they perceive about you.