Easy Self-Audits for the Busy Law Office

By Nancy Byerly Jones. Published 1999, 352 pages with diskettes

The previous issue of LAWPRO Magazine contained a book review of *Risk Management: Survival Tools for Lawyers*. This book stressed the importance of self-audits as part of a law firm's efforts to identify areas where a firm's practices could put it at risk of, among other things, a malpractice claim.

Easy Self-Audits for the Busy Law Office by Nancy Byerly Jones provides an extensive series of checklists to help firms carry out these audits. Ms. Jones established the practice management service for the North Carolina state bar, and then went on to found a consulting company to assist law firms on-site and through training seminars. Her book was published by the American Bar Association in 1999, and while it is now out of print, it is still a valuable addition to any practice management collection. The practicePRO Lending Library has two copies available.

The audits are broken into categories that mirror practicePRO's risk management content, and consist of a series of questions and checklists to be completed by all firm managers, lawyers and staff. Not every audit is applicable to every firm member, but it is important that as many staff as possible provide input into the various areas.

The main self-audit topics are:

- **Client interactions:** Does the firm solicit feedback from clients and ensure it is taking on the "right" kind of clients?

- **Individual assessments & planning:** Are lawyers and support staff happy in their work? Job satisfaction can be reflected in workplace performance.

- **Support staff management:** They keep the firm operating, and are also often the public face of the firm. Make sure their morale and professionalism are both kept high.

- **Office management systems & procedures:** These are essential practice management areas that will help firms avoid a claim, such as calendaring, confidentiality, conflicts checking, proper documentation, timekeeping, and trust accounts.

- **Time and stress management:** Lawyers able to manage their time and reduce stress are much more effective, and less likely to make a costly mistake.

- Additional audits cover things to keep in mind when opening and closing a practice, ethics, and goal setting.

For firms that have decided to review or revamp their office procedures, perhaps after completing some of the audits above, there are two additional resources available from our library: the *Law Office Policy & Procedures Manual, 5th Edition* by Howard I. Hatoff and Robert C. Wert, and the *Law Office Policy & Procedures Manual for Solos and Small Firms, 3rd Edition* by Demetrios Dimitriou (both published by the ABA).

Both cover every aspect of basic law firm operation and are designed as templates to help firms develop their own procedure and policy guides for firm employees. Although some aspects are particular to American employment law, they still contain a wealth of content covering topics such as staffing, personnel issues, privacy, office security, filing systems, technology, billing procedures and travel policies. CD-ROMS are included with Word versions of all the templates and sample forms.

practicePRO can't stress enough that good firm management helps avoid mistakes that lead to claims. All of the above titles are useful resources for firms wanting to review their internal practices to identify and correct any shortcomings. It's an exercise that will pay long-term benefits for all members of the firm.

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The practicePRO Lending Library has some new titles worth checking out:

- The 3rd edition of *Women Rainmakers' Best Marketing Tips* by Theda C. Snyder contains more than 150 tips to help you develop a practical, creative and cost-effective marketing strategy that fits your personality (and is useful for men too).

- *Virtual Law Practice* by Stephanie L. Kimbro explores the ways law firms are moving beyond bricks and mortar offices to offer clients greater services online.

- *Google for Lawyers* by Carole A. Levitt, Mark E. Rosch helps practitioners understand how they can put all of Google's powerful online tools to work in their practices.

- And coming soon, the 6th edition of **Law Office Policy & Procedures Manual** featured here. The new edition covers new areas such as social media and going green.

For full descriptions of these titles, including downloadable tables of contents, go to practicepro.ca/library