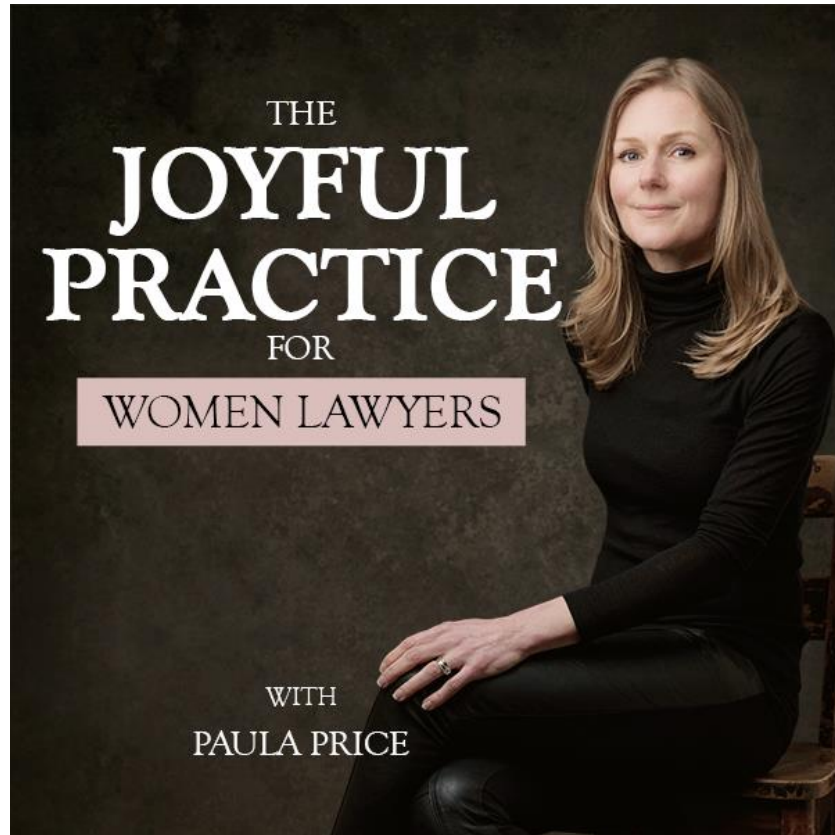


**Ep #39: Questions About Going Solo?
Meet Ashley Syer and Amy Grubb**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

Ep #39: Questions About Going Solo? Meet Ashley Syer and Amy Grubb

You're listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast episode number 39.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, lawyer turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. Join me every week for a break from the hustle so we can focus on you, what you truly want, and how you can create it.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hello, my friends and welcome back to the podcast. I'm delighted to have you join me here this week to tune into the conversation that I have with the lovely and amazing Ashley Syer and Amy Grubb. Ashley and Amy are both lawyers. They have both had the experience of going solo or going rogue as some people call it, and they are here today to share with you their experiences of going solo as well as offer support and advice for those of you who may be thinking about doing the same.

In today's episode, Ashley and Amy are going to talk about some of the things that they experienced in their transition to going solo, some of the common challenges that you might face if you choose to do that, and they're going to share with you the type of support that they can offer you if this is a decision that you decide to make for yourself. So without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to our conversation. I hope you love listening to this conversation as much as I loved recording it.

For all of you who have more questions about this, I invite you to reach out to Ashley and Amy. They are amazing as you will learn in just a few

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moments. I look forward to reconnecting with all of you again next week. By for now.

Paula: Hi everybody. Welcome back to the podcast. I'm so excited to be introducing all of you to two very special guests. They are both going to be talking to us about what it's like to go solo, answering all the questions that you may have about that. We have Ashley Syer who is joining us from Vancouver, British Columbia, and we have Amy Grubb who is joining us from Ottawa, Canada. So welcome Ashley and Amy.

Ashley: Thanks for having us.

Paula: So good to see you. For the benefit of those who are listening, unfortunately you're not able to see Amy and Ashley. I am. It's really fun. We just had a bit of a conversation as we got ready for today. It's just such a treat to have them both here. I thought I would ask each of them to introduce themselves and tell us a bit more about themselves. So Ashley, starting with you, can you please tell us. You're a lawyer, mediator. You are the founder of The Lawyer Incubator. Can you please tell us more about yourself and what you do?

Ashley: Yeah. I think I'm best described as a woman who wears many hats. So I am a lawyer at my own practice, Syer Law. I am a mediator through my own mediation practice at Gastown Mediation. I recently founded what I understand to be the first Lawyer Incubator in Canada, which is super exciting.

So the idea that it's a place where lawyers who want to start their own practices can come to our physical space or have some kind of virtual situation and get some of the mentorship that you're often missing when

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you start out your own practice. To have somebody to for those questions, some of the supports and resources. Both peer resources and a little bit more senior mentorship.

Paula: Meaning. Thank you so much Ashley. Amy, you're joining us from Ottawa. Amy is a lawyer and legal consultant. We'd love to hear more about what you do Amy.

Amy: Sure. Thanks Paula so much for having me. It's pretty fun being here. So I practiced for many years. I went out on my own a few years ago. During that time, I had a lot of lawyers asking me about the process of going solo and how I did it and how I found clients. So I now own Grubb Legal Consulting. So I help other lawyers go solo. I also help more established firms who may need some help with technology, with marketing, or with hiring. So I do that work virtually one-on-one with lawyers primarily in North America.

Paula: Amazing. Thank you so much amazing. It's so amazing to have both of you here. Thank you again for making the time to join us today. I thought we might start out by talking a little bit about each of your respective journeys going solo. So Ashley if you wouldn't mind sharing, what was it about going solo that attracted you in the first place? What prompted you to do it? We'd love to hear more.

Ashley: Yeah it was actually a decision born out of necessity. I think it was about eight years ago. It seems strange that it was that long ago. I found myself in a situation of I was at a firm that wasn't a good fit. I knew I needed to leave. The market wasn't great at the time. There weren't a lot of jobs. I wasn't quite sure what I needed or wanted. I had just gone through some fairly challenging family circumstances.

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Just out of pure coincidence I think the same week that I had been rejected from an inhouse position, I was about to say auditioning for. It's what it felt like. I got a call from a law school classmate of mine who said, "Look, I'm renting an office with a couple other lawyers. We're going to have a spare space. It's yours if you want it." I thought well I never wanted to be a sole practitioner. I never wanted to have my own firm, but sure why not? Let's give it a go. I figured I'd give it a year and see what happened, and that was eight years ago. I'm still practicing as a sole practitioner.

I've started up this office that I'm now running The Lawyer Incubator out of. It has been filled with other sole practitioners. What ended up being kind of interesting for me is that in the three years I've been in this space in Gastown, every lawyer except one was joining us starting out their practice as the as a solo or a new partnership for the first time. What I finally was doing was helping those people get themselves started, get up and running.

Then once they had themselves kind of a little bit of a baseline of what their practice was going to be, we ended up having this really wonderful open door situation where everybody could knock on another door and say, "Hey, I've got this thing going on. What do you think about it? Hey, can I run this by you? I'm having this problem with opposing counsel or a difficult client or whatever it is." It ended up giving this wonderful bit of mentorship that you sometimes get in a firm if you're in a good firm, but you really don't get as a solo.

So having this space and having that open door situation ended up being the very best thing. So a lot of the solos who joined me ended up being so successful that they outgrew the space. They hired somebody or they decided to partner up with somebody else. Then they moved on and somebody else would come and take their place. It became a bit of a joke that I was running this unofficial lawyer incubator.

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Then with the pandemic, I ended up losing a few of the office lawyers who were taking up some office space. Not because they were doing poorly but because they were doing so well that they actually outgrew the space. I thought well gosh how am I going to refill this space? Nobody wants offices during the pandemic. Everybody's working from home. Then I started thinking about this joke about well you've been running this lawyer incubator for the last couple of years. Why not try to do it officially?

So that's where the idea of that was hatched. I'm really excited that on March 1st our first official Lawyer Incubator lawyer is going to be joining us in the office. I've got a few more people in deck who I think are going to be joining virtually. So super exciting times.

Paula: That's so amazing. I have to say Ashley so I have had the benefit of meeting Ashley in person prepandemic. It was at an event sponsored by the Women Lawyers Forum. The title of the event was called Going Rogue. I just loved that. I'd never heard it before. By coincidence we ended up in the parkade together. I think you had a rental car that had not appeared. So I had the pleasure of driving you home and chatting in the car.

Then when you opened your new space, I was able to come and visit. For everyone listening, it is a beautiful space. Right now we can see the exposed brick wall behind Ashley. It's like the quintessential Gastown office. So it's such a treat and a pleasure to have witnessed this part of your journey.

We've met for coffee and I've heard some of your story. I think it's such an inspiration for others who are thinking about going solo. I also think—You mentioned mentorship on more than on occasion. That you are contributing so much in terms of giving back to others who are interested in following the same path and providing resources. Now literally providing a physical

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or virtual incubator to lawyers who want to go solo. So it's so great to hear, thank you.

Ashley: Yeah thanks Paula. You know, I still managed to keep that orchid alive that you brought to my office warming.

Paula: Oh my gosh. Amazing.

Ashley: It hasn't bloomed again, but the plant itself is still alive.

Paula: You're amazing. Wow. There's no green plant that's ever survived my house, I'll tell you that. Let alone for how many years and a pandemic. I love it. Love it. Amy, we would love to hear your story. So please tell us about your experience in terms of I understand you were in big law on Bay Street, and you transitioned to a sole practice. We'd love to hear more about your experience.

Amy: Sure. It's similar to Ashley's in that I never thought I was going to go out on my own. It was never my plan. I never considered it. So yes, I started on Bay Street. Then I moved to Ottawa at a national firm, and I worked there for about 10 years. Towards the end of my time there it was just so busy and so crazy. I knew I didn't want to stay, but I didn't have time to just take a break and take a breath and figure out okay, what on earth do I want to do next? Because I had always thought I was going to stay in big law.

So I actually took a leave from work. During that time, I started an online business totally not law related. So I would go to a lot of networking events and just learn all about marketing and having an online business. I met some really amazing entrepreneurs. So they would hear about my online business. Then they'd hear I was also a lawyer. They'd get all excited and

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say like, “Oh can you help me with this? I have all these questions.” At the time I was not practicing.

So I had a cousin who actually lives in Colona, and she’s in the creative online space. I had a few conversations with her. She was like, “You need to start a practice. I’m going to be your first client. Just do it. See what happens.” So I thought about it for a little bit. I thought well, okay. I already have some clients lined up. So she was my very first client. She was the one who gave me the encouragement to say like, “You know what, just do it and try it.”

Like Ashley was saying, I was willing to give it 9/12 months and see what happened because you can always change your mind. So I did it. I really enjoyed it. I did it before the pandemic. So I was working from home, working virtually. I really loved it. I was posting about in on LinkedIn, and that’s why I think a lot of other lawyers heard about what I was doing and wanted to learn more.

So it’s definitely a path that I didn’t plan for. I never in a million years would think that I was helping other lawyers go solo, but here we are and I love it. I think what I’ve learned from this process is to just continually follow your curiosity and your passion. You never know where it’s going to take you.

Paula: That is so lovely Amy. Thank you so much for sharing. I found you Amy through LinkedIn. I saw the posts that you were sharing, and so much of it resonated with me. I have a coaching practice. So I’m not practicing law, but I’m doing the things that one does when you start a practice. Which is figuring out some of your messaging and who your clients are that you are wanting to work with. It’s interesting. I didn’t know that you had an online business that was no law related. May I ask what it was or what it is?

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Amy: Yeah. So it was a curated gift shop. So I sold handmade goods that were made by Canadian artists. I will be clear. I did not make the things because I'm not crafty. People, all sorts of artists from across Canada, I would sell their things on my site and take a cut from it. So it was something totally different, but it led to all of this to be honest.

Paula: So fabulous. I spent some time on your website, Amy, getting ready for today. For anybody who goes and explores the website, which I highly recommend doing especially if you have questions about going solo. I will confess. I took so much of these questions from blog posts that are on your site. One of the questions is when is the right time to go solo?

Amy: Well, thanks for asking that. Thanks for checking out my website too. When is the right time to go solo? I will say there is never really a right time. I get people coming to me from all different stages of their career. Some of them are brand new just outside of law school and they knew they wanted to do this. Others are just out of law school and they can't find a job. So it's kind of like well, I'll give this a go.

Others have lost their job or maybe they didn't make partner. They've been at their firm for a few years. They've always thought about going solo, and now they're thinking, "Well, maybe now's the right time." They're off on mat leave and they don't want to go back to their firm.

So there's a lot of different reasons why people do it, but I don't think necessarily that the stars all align and the skies open up and someone out there says, "This is the time. Go do it." So really for a lot of lawyers what I'll say to them is like if you really think this is what you want to do then we can work on the process. We can put all the steps together.

If this is something like you kind of want to try but you want to do a few other things, it gets to be a bit more difficult because not only are you

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practicing law but you're also running a business at the same time. So it's quite time consuming, but it's a lot of fun for a lot of people. It's not for everyone, for sure.

Even for myself, I wasn't sure if I was going to like it, but I loved it. I loved running my business. I loved having my own clients. I loved having my own schedule. I loved being able to take Tuesday afternoon off just because I wanted to. So there were a lot of perks to it. There were a lot of challenges as well. In terms of timing, it's a bit all over the place when people do it.

Paula: I love that Amy. I just wanted to touch on something that you said before. You mentioned that other lawyers saw what you were doing and came out and asked questions of you about that process. I think one of the things that you're doing, and you do it really well, is you're giving that idea and that implicit permission to others who want to explore that path and go down that path.

For those of you who are thinking about going solo, as you said Amy, there's no right time, right? There's no single moment where everything aligns and it's absolutely when to do it, but what I hear from what you're saying is that if that curiosity sparks within you that they can reach out to you, they can reach out to Ashley. They can start asking some questions. They can reach out to solo practitioners that they know in their networks. Just start exploring what that might look like for them because maybe it is something that would really work out for them, but you never know until you actually go in and try. So thank you so much.

Amy: Absolutely. I would encourage that. That's exactly what I did when I was thinking about it. I spoke to as many lawyers as I could about what does this look like? What does this mean? Where do you go to with your questions? And built my network that way.

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Paula: Yeah absolutely.

Ashley: I think that's such great advice Amy. I did the same sort of thing. Pick up the phone, send an email. It's amazing how willing people are to share some of their time.

Paula: Including both of you. This is amazing. This is so helpful. Thank you.

Amy: Paula if I can just jump in one more thing. So the solo small firm community is amazing. So I was in a totally different community beforehand being in a large law firm. Then I met all these sole practitioners, and they just blew me out of the water with how supportive they are. How they will pick up the phone and help you through an issue. They've been phenomenal, and I had never experienced that before in my career.

So I would encourage anybody who's listening who's thinking about going solo, embrace the community. Get to know people on LinkedIn. There's a ton of Facebook groups as well. There's so many resources for solos. So take advantage of them.

Paula: I'm so glad you said that Amy. Ashley, I remember when you and I were talking prepandemic, way back when. Learning from you about some of the resources that you were talking about, different groups of practitioner who were out supporting each other. Like you Amy, I had not been exposed to this area, this group of lawyers before I was in big law as well. It was so eye opening to see that there was these other communities of lawyers who were working in the sole firm environment. It was so neat to hear their experiences.

Ashley, I'm dying to ask you our next question. I would love to hear more about your experience with the community that you've been engaged with. I

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would love to ask you as well about some of the challenges that you have experienced in going solo.

Ashley: Yeah I mean it's not an easy thing. You don't just do it and then it works immediately.

Paula: Yeah.

Ashley: There certainly are a lot of challenges. I mean what Amy was just saying about you have to remember you're not just running a law practice. You're also running a business. There's so much that goes into that.

One of the challenges for me when I was getting started was I don't think I had any appreciation of how much work that was going to be. I knew it would be work. I had no sense of actually how much work it was going to be. Everything from finding your services providers to setting up your systems to getting your clients. Then once you had your clients, not just maintaining them through good law work, but you've got to bill them. You have to collect from them. You have to do all this other administrative stuff that you probably don't think of.

Particularly the people who are coming from maybe larger firms that have a whole department to deal with some of this stuff. You're doing everything from printing to stuff envelopes to running to the post office to get stamps and ordering office supplies. There's so much that goes into it. So running the business part is really one of the things that I think a lot of people underestimate. A lot of the new sole practitioners that I talk to, I hear the same thing from them. It's oh my gosh, I really didn't appreciate how much work that was going to be.

Then there are the challenges of where do you find your clients? If you're going to do marketing, what kind of marketing? What's going to work?

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Who's your client base? That's a real challenge as well. I think one of the biggest challenges, and it's one of the things that kind of prompted me to start the space that I have here and now the incubator is I think one of the biggest challenges is isolation.

When I first started, I was doing what I call kitchen table law, which is law from my kitchen table. I'm a person that likes to be around people. For me, it was just sole crushing trying to do this from my kitchen table without anybody else around me. Some people thrive at it, and I am in awe of those people. I'm not one of them. I think especially when you're getting going, not having those built in people to go to is such a challenge. What Amy was saying about the community being so open and inviting, I completely agree with that. I echo that.

Recently in Vancouver and now it's starting to spread throughout B.C. There's this group that I'm one of the administrators of called B.C. SOS, which I think the name started as a bit of a joke. It's B.C. Small or Solo. We started off in September as a Slack channel thinking okay, we'll get a few people together. We can exchange some ideas and if people have questions.

I think we're close to 100 people now, which is really exciting because it's starting to provide that support. That's helping to combat that one challenge. I'm sure Amy's got some other challenges that your clients or the people that you're coaching have to deal with.

Amy: Yeah. I think what you're doing is amazing, Ashley, and so needed. Because the number one thing that people come to me and they have questions about in terms of going solo, especially the newer lawyers is that they don't know where to go with questions. They need a mentor. They're looking for a mentor and they have no idea where to go to find one. I think

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what you're doing is so important and so helpful for lawyers in this community.

In terms of some of the other things, some of the other challenges I see with lawyers is I see a lot of times lawyers who are A type personalities who want everything to be perfect. So they might say to me, "I'm going to go solo September 1st." Meanwhile they're like getting their website absolutely perfect with the best photos and the best copy. They're figuring out their legal practice management software. They're having it all ready. They're doing all of this work in the background to have it set for September 1st. Then September 1st comes and it's not quite ready yet.

Some people also are they hide a bit behind the computer. They don't want to get out and say, "Hey I'm going solo. I'm a family law practitioner. I'm in Victoria. Here I am." So they hide a bit. So then six months down the line, they'll call me and they'll say, "Well, I'm not getting any work." It's like well, are you still working on that website? What are you doing to market your practice?

Another thing too is I think people who are preparing to go solo are worried about the cost of going solo. All of the software and all of the things that you need. I caution lawyers who are going out to really think about what you need to start. Try to keep your expenses low.

You may not need office space. If you do, you can do something like Ashley's space where you can just rent. You don't have to have a full time rental expense. You might not need the most amazing expensive software out there. So go with the basics. You may not even need to hire anyone in the beginning. Go with the basics. Keep your expenses low. See what kind of revenue is coming in. Then you can pay for the more big ticket items, especially once you know more about what exactly you might need.

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Paula: So helpful. Thank you Ashley. Thank you Amy. These are such great insights. I have to say, Ashley when you were talking about that isolation piece, I think that is something that we can all relate to. I know with the pandemic, you and Amy and I, we all started out doing our individual practices prepandemic. So we had that experience before March 2020.

I think when the world collectively went remote, we all started to see that it's quite challenging, especially for extroverted personalities, right. Like I'm relatively introverted so it's not so bad, but I talk to people who it is really a big, big adjustment. I think for both of you highlight community and where you find community is so helpful.

The practical suggestions on what they think about and some of the ways you might approach those first months, those first years. Amy I think what you're talking about with getting that website perfect versus getting out there, right. Done is better than perfect. The sooner you're out there communicating who you are and what you do, the sooner you're going to have clients who are going to show up and ask to work with you.

Amy this next question is for you, and it's along those lines. One of the questions on your blog, which I love, is a question that I get asked and I think about too, which is this notion of your personal brand. It's something that I just think is so interesting because we all have one, as you point out in your blog post. We all have a personal brand whether or not we're conscious of it. I would love for you to talk a little bit more about what a personal brand is and why it's important.

Amy: Sure. So I think it was Jeff Bezos who said your personal brand is what people say about you when you leave the room. So regardless of if you're consciously thinking about your personal brand, we all have one, like you said Paula. So I'm a big proponent of let's control this brand of yours

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and what it is you're saying. Really when you're thinking about your personal brand, you want to think about what makes you unique. What would make a client want to come to you as a wills and estates lawyer versus every other wills and estates lawyer within a 10 kilometer radius?

A lot of times lawyers will say to me, "Well, I'm just like everybody else. I'm a lawyer." But you're not. You're more than that. So what makes you unique? Perhaps you have a unique perspective. You worked in a related field prior to going to law school. If you were in the construction industry and now you're a construction lawyer. So that gives you that unique attribute going forward.

Perhaps you got divorced or your parents got divorced at a young age and it really impacted you. Now you practice divorce law. Perhaps you're really big on customer service. So your thing is that anyone who calls your office, someone's going to pick up the phone and actually talk to you. So once you figure out what it is that makes you unique, that's what you want to be talking about. That's the message you want to be conveying.

Perhaps your personal brand is a really professional tied up brand. So if that's the way you're going to do it, you want to think about your pictures on your website and your messaging on social media and things like that so that you can kind of tie it all up in a nice bow. Really at the end of the day it's about controlling the message about you and your firm. Making it all encompassing as you go forward.

Paula: Beautiful. Thank you so much Amy. I think, Ashley, you and I might have had a conversation about this way back when when I first saw you Going Rogue or maybe it was part of what you highlighted in your discussion. If anyone goes to Ashley's website, you have two. There's the incubator website and then there's your practice website. Your messaging is very clear and very straightforward. In fact, I think it was part of your

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discussion. So to me, that speaks to personal brand. It's I'm a lawyer who's going to make this process simple and straight forward for you.

So I think that it's such a great example of that branding. I think the other side of that too, and Amy you talk about this on your website, is that notion of the personal brand you communicate is going to speak to somebody. I love Amy in one of the things you posted, you talked about writing your bio for your law firm, right. I remember doing for a lawyer. I literally followed the process that you talked about which is go to everybody else's bio and then copy what applies to you. With the objective of fitting in business what we're talking about here which is the personal brands. What actually sets you apart?

So I think it's such a great exercise. And one that we should all be doing consciously whether or not we're working in a law firm and that's where you want to stay or if you're out on your own and wanting to distinguish yourself as a sole practitioner. So love that. Ashley this next question is for you. I think you may want to add something also to this personal brand conversation, sorry.

Ashley: Oh that's okay.

Paula: Which is some of the benefits of going solo. Please feel free if you have something else to say about branding, by all means jump in.

Ashley: Oh yeah no. I was just going to say when you're thinking about who your audience is. If your audience is sort of your average lay person, just consider writing in plain language. Like I was chuckling to myself about my bio in my website. It starts off with, "Hi I'm Ashley. I'd like to help you solve your legal problems." So it's like let's make it simple.

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I guess that kind of ties into your question of the benefits of going solo is that you get to set it up how you want to. You get to present yourself to the world in a way that feels authentic to you. You get to practice in a way that makes sense for you. For some people, that's going to mean setting up their dream firm that mirrors some other firm and that's what they want to imitate. That's great.

For other people that's going to be, you know what? I want to always be able to pick up my kid at 3:00. So I'm never going to work past then. For other people, it's I'm never going to set foot in the office on a weekend because I don't want to. I want my weekends to myself. For other people that means I'm going to work my ass off and I can be in my office seven days a week because I want to be a success if that's what that means to that person.

For me, as I said, I didn't plan to do this. I figured once I was doing it well, what are the things that are important to me in my life? Then how can I do those things while also working in a way that feels authentic to me? So for me, that means I don't respond to clients at night. I don't respond to clients on the weekends. Unless they're emergencies. There are always exceptions, but generally I don't.

It means if I go on vacation, I'm on vacation. I delete my work email off my phone. I don't look at it. If I lose some clients who might have hired me, oh well. I'm sure they'll find somebody else who can help them. I'm not the only person who practices law. As much as we all like to think that we're indispensable, sometimes we're not and that's okay.

For me, it's really the flexibility. The ability to create the kind of practice that you want, and then the flexibility to have a life outside your office. I do things that aren't law. I have hobbies. I like to go skiing and take photographs and act in community theater.

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When I was fairly early, maybe a year or two into my solo practice, I took a month off to rehearse for a musical in the Fringe Festival. I wasn't being paid for it. Well, I mean I guess I was technically but not well. It was just something I wanted to do and I could. I wouldn't do it again necessarily because that was a lot of time to take off, but I don't regret it. I'm glad I did it.

I've taken off work for three weeks at a time to go spend a week on a river boat in the Amazon. That was great. My clients weren't upset that I wasn't there. If they were, they didn't tell me about it, and that's okay. I think the real benefits are that ability to create the thing you want and the flexibility to not just have the practice you want or the work life that you want but to have the life that you want. It's hard work, but the dividends are amazing.

Paula: That's so amazing. So inspiring Ashley. Thank you. What about your Amy? What do you think some of the benefits are of going solo?

Amy: Well, and I just want to tack onto what Ashley was talking about. One of the very first things I do with my one-on-one clients is we map out the client's five year vision. So where do they want to be in five years professionally and personally. I always say this is no holds barred. This is no judgement. You tell me what you want this to look like.

Then we have the most amazing conversations. There have been tears. There has been laughter. It's really interesting to hear people, what they want. Because I think a lot of times we don't take that time to actually think about it.

So once we've mapped out the vision then we think about okay, what are the steps? What are the goals? How are we going to get there? How are we going to set up this practice? So like Ashley was saying if you want to take the summer off or if you want to leave everyday at 3:00, how can we

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make that happen? So I think that is so important. That's such a benefit to the practice.

Also Ashley was talking about clients and she doesn't respond on the weekends to her clients. I would really say if you have a client who has a problem with that and says like, "Well, I need you on the weekend," then that's not the right client for you. You're not the right fit. So you can say no to clients. I encourage people to say no. You don't have to take on all the work.

When I worked in a law firm, any file that came across my desk I had to take it. I didn't have a say. When you run the business, you call the shots. You can say, "Oh you know what? I don't think this is the right file for me. We're not a great fit or however you want to phrase it." And refer that work to someone else. You don't have to take on all the bad files. Ashley, it looks like you want to jump in.

Ashley: I'm so glad you said that because that was one of the things I forgot to say is you have control over who your clients are. That client that you were just talking about who says, "but I need you on the weekends", I have fired that client more than once. It's the greatest feeling in the world to know you know what? I'm just going to write off the time I spent on your file. Good luck to you. You will find somebody who will help you on the weekends, and that person is not me. It's the greatest feeling. You don't have that feeling necessarily when you're at a firm.

Amy: It is the best feeling. I think a lot of times lawyers have a hard time saying no and they'll take on everything, but you don't have to. So this is how lawyers who have their own practice love what they're doing. They love their clients because they're working with great people who are a really great fit for them.

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Paula: I love this. This is such an inspiring conversation.

Ashley: Oh I was just going to say. I'll show this for your benefit the two of you who can see me. I'm holding up a box of Life cereal. This actually arrived at my office by courier from a client who is a long standing client, a great client, who had taken some of my time late in the day two evenings in a row. He knows that I don't respond in the evenings or on the weekends, and he respects it. But he had an emergency, and I helped him.

He sent me this Life cereal box with a very kind note and a gift certificate to a restaurant to say, "I know that I took up some of your lifetime, and I hope that this goes back towards balancing your work-life balance." That's the kind of client you get to have when you're a solo. When you set boundaries with them and they respect it, it's amazing. I cried. His note is right here on my wall. I keep it on my wall right next to my desk.

Paula: That is so beautiful.

Amy: That's amazing. I remember you posted about that on LinkedIn. That's phenomenal.

Ashley: Yep.

Paula: I love that. I love that. You get to keep the clients who send you gift cards and delightful cereal, and you get to say goodbye to the clients whose expectations are not aligned with what you're offering. I love this conversation.

One of the things I just wanted to touch on is Amy, that five year plan that you were talking about. I think, at least my experience when I was practicing in a firm was be more at the affect of what was going on around me versus actually carving out the plan that I wanted to execute on my

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own. I think when you become a sole practitioner, you are running the show. You do not have a choice but to create and set the framework, the parameters, the boundaries, the program, all of that, what it looks like.

I would actually invite everybody who is listening whether or not they are planning to go solo to do that exercise. To ask themselves where they want to be five years out. No judgement, as you said. World being your oyster, what does that look like?

Because I think when you actually take the time to start asking yourself the questions about what it is that you want, what your values are, where you want to see yourself, you'll get some really interesting answers. From there you can make decisions about your practice. Whether it's in a firm or in house or wherever it might be or if it's a sole practice. So that leads us nicely as well to our next question, which is for you Amy. Which is how do you know if a solo practice is right for you?

Amy: This is a tough question because like I said at the beginning, I never thought I was going to go solo. In a million years, that was not anything I was interested in doing. Then once I did it, I loved it. So it's hard to know. So there's two sides, which Ashley and I have both talked about being a solo. There's being a practicing lawyer side and then there's also the running the business side.

So I've had conversations with lawyers who are thinking about leaving their firm. They're thinking about going solo, but they'll say to me, "I don't want to do any of that admin stuff. I don't want to do the marketing. I don't want to figure out the tech. I don't want to do that piece." So there are ways that people can come in and help with the tech and things like that, but you still have to do those pieces of the work. So if you're one of those people and you're like, "I just want to practice law," then going solo is not right for you.

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But if you're intrigued by things like marketing and technology and learning. If you're open to learning and have a growth mindset then I think being a solo might be an interesting opportunity for you. So it's a hard one to answer Paula. I don't have a great answer. Ashley what do you think?

Ashley: I don't know. I think that is a great answer Amy. I mean you don't know, right. I mean I never thought I'd be a solo either. I never wanted to be a solo. I think you're right about the mindset. If all you want to do is practice law and you're not interested in the business side of things or the admin side of things, it's probably not going to be right for you. It's not right for everybody, and that's okay.

I think you have to have at least some glimmer of an entrepreneurial spirit and an interest in it if you're going to take the leap. Like what Amy was saying earlier, give yourself a window of time if you want to try it. You can change your mind. That's the nice thing.

One thing I wanted to add was a personal story. So when I went solo, I remember meeting another lawyer I knew. She's a parent like me. So I knew her from the school. I didn't know her really well. We were talking, and she works at a very large law firm. She's a partner. She was saying, "What are you doing now?"

I was embarrassed to say I went solo. I work from home. So I kind of said it like that. I couldn't believe her reaction. Like her jaw dropped and she was like, "I wish I had the guts to do that. I wish I could do that." I was saying to her like you can. You can do it. She was just like, "I could never do that."

So I do think for anyone listening, you'll be surprised when you do go solo at how many people will say to you, "Oh I wish I could have done that. I wish I did that." So you definitely have to be comfortable getting uncomfortable, and also not worry so much about what other people think.

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Because at the end of the day, this is your life. This is your decision. You're the one who's forging your path. So make the decision that's right for you not necessarily for everyone else and all of those other people who want to weigh in on your path.

Paula: Thank you so much Amy. Both of you have shared so much information, useful advice. I'm wishing we could have this conversation last the entire day, but I know you both have things that you need to do. So we'll wrap up for today. Before we do that, I would love for you to share how we can find you. So Amy, I'll start with you. How do people find you? How do they work with you? Who do you work with? All this will be linked too in the show notes that go with this episode. Amy, we'd love to hear it.

Amy: Thanks Paula. The best place to find me is on LinkedIn. I'm quite active on there. So connect, send me a message, and let me know you heard me on Paula's podcast. I would love to chat with you there. You can also check out my website. It's grubblaw.ca. I do have a free download on there for anyone who's thinking of going solo. It's a workbook to go through some different aspects to think about.

I also do work with CLIO as well as a certified consultant. So I help other lawyers with implementing CLIO and getting the most out of it. So I will send Paula the link for that as well. So those are the best ways to get in touch.

Paula: Beautiful. For those who—I imagine everybody has heard of CLIO, but if they haven't heard of CLIO what exactly is that?

Amy: Yeah. Ashley I think you use CLIO as well and are a bit of a fan of them. So they are a legal practice management software. It's like an all in one solution for solo small firms. I am a big fan of theirs. There's a ton of

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different software out there. This is the one that I've really resonated with and I like working with the most.

Paula: Beautiful. Do you do consults then with lawyers who are interested in going solo? Like you'd have a conversation with them? Or how does your process work?

Amy: Yeah they can reach out to me, and we can have a bit of a conversation. Just talk about what they're looking for, how I work with them, determine if we're a fit. We can go from there. Yeah, I do work one-on-one with lawyers.

Paula: Beautiful. You're in Ottawa, but you mentioned earlier that you've worked with lawyers in the U.S. as well.

Amy: Yep. North America. So virtual. Thank goodness for Zoom and all of the wonderful technology we have. So yeah. I can help lawyers all over the place.

Paula: God bless Zoom. Ashley please we would love to hear more about you, how lawyers can work with you, how they can connect with you.

Ashley: Yeah so you can find me on LinkedIn as well. I'm not quite as active as Amy, but I'm there. I'm out there. If you want to find me for law, you can find me at Syerlaw.ca. If you want me for mediation, you can find me at gastownmediation.ca. For information about The Lawyer Incubator, it is thelawyerincubator.ca.

I actually am pretty excited that CLIO has agreed to be a partner for The Lawyer Incubator as well. So they're going to be providing a year's subscription to their manage service for all of the Lawyer Incubator lawyers. We've got this physical space. We've got actually one office left for a

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Lawyer Incubator lawyer, but there's also virtual options. I've had people reach out to me from across the country and actually one person from Australia, which was super exciting. So that community feel can stretch across the globe if we let it.

Paula: Oh totally. It's amazing. So for those of you who are interested in Ashley's legal practice, what are your areas of practice?

Ashley: I do practice in a range of areas. I do a lot of employment law, housing related law. So residential tenancy, strata. Then some human rights and other tribunal work. Lots of small business types of disputes.

Paula: Beautiful.

Ashley: I mediate any civil dispute.

Paula: Beautiful. Thank you both so much for joining us today. It has been such a pleasure having you. You've shared so much valuable information and such an inspiration. So thank you.

Amy: Thank you for having me. This was so fun.

Ashley: Yeah this was great. Thank you so much Paula. Thanks Amy.

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