WHAT IS THE ATTICUS PRACTICE BUILDER™?

The Atticus Practice Builder™ may be one of the most important workshops you ever attend. It was designed to help you take control over your practice like never before. It will prepare you to make the changes necessary to increase your income, decrease your stress, and take better care of your clients. For many attorneys the workshop represents an important demarcation point in how they think about their practice.

The workshop has been described as a boot camp to train attorneys in how to run a business that does the practice of law. The workshop lasts two days; 8am – 8pm on the first day, 8am – 6pm on the second day. While this may seem intense, your biggest challenge will come when you return to your office to implement the ideas and concepts you have learned. It is back at the office where you will be confronted by the reality of implementing new ideas in the face of client demands, staff issues, and interruptions. To help you be as successful as possible, and as part of your Practice Builder, Atticus will provide four weeks of follow-up coaching after you complete the Atticus Practice Builder that is included in the price of your tuition.

In addition, Atticus has designed the Advanced Implementation System (AIS) to help you get long-term results from the workshop. This high level, turn-key program is very effective, but in truth it is not for everyone; in fact, less than 50% of attendees will even be eligible for the program. The AIS will be discussed in greater detail later in this briefing document.

WHY THE ATTICUS PRACTICE BUILDER?

Maybe you are wondering if you really need to make a change at all. After all, your practice is going pretty well, and sure, you are working a lot of hours; but isn’t hard work just a part of being successful?

THE FROG & THE KETTLE

We often tell the story about the frog and the kettle. You have probably heard some version of it, but it goes like this. Imagine a small kettle of boiling water. If a live frog is dropped in the water – the frog will immediately jump out. How come? Because, even a frog knows the difference between boiling hot water and cold air.

Now, let’s take that same experiment and this time bring the water to a tepid temperature and have the frog jump in the kettle again. What happens? This time the frog just sits there, basking in the comfortable water. Then slowly, ever so slowly, you turn up the heat on that little frog. Eventually, the frog boils to death.
Now what if we told you that your law firm is taking over your life in much the same way? When you first started practicing law, didn’t it start out that you worked late just a couple of nights? Then, over time, did you start working a few more nights each week? Then you start to come in on weekends. You turn up the stress a little bit more each day. And soon it just becomes a way of life and you don’t even notice that you are boiling yourself away. Think about it. You did not start your practice imagining that it would turn out this way. You were seduced by the promise of a firm with the possibility of good income, control, growth and independence and what happens? For many attorneys, they slowly start to boil and then they burn out.

THE DEFINITION OF INSANITY

At the Atticus Practice Builder, we are going to challenge you to re-engineer your practice so that you can increase your income, decrease the number of hours you work, and take control over your practice, but we don’t expect you to take on that responsibility blindly or alone.

After many years of working with successful attorneys, we have discovered that traditional approaches to building and managing a law firm are fundamentally flawed. Instead of giving you the results you expect, they negatively impact your ability to increase your income and keep you under a constant pace of stress; leaving you to work more hours, weekends and giving you less time for your family and yourself.

In addition, we assert that there is a bit of collective insanity within the legal profession.

Every year, Atticus Practice Advisors are invited to speak with thousands of attorneys around the country at bar association events and special programs. We often ask these attorneys to write down the reasons they first wanted to start a firm or become a partner in the first place. Then we ask them the realities of being an owner, partner or shareholder in their firm.

And whether we are in Boston, Orlando, Charleston, New York City, or any other city in the country, the responses are typically the same. Most attorneys report that what they intended to achieve from their law firm was freedom, independence, control, professional and intellectual stimulation, economic gain, the ability to help people, a creative outlet, working with interesting people, and the ability to contemplate challenging matters. (Do any of their responses fit for why you started your practice?)

Our next question to these attorneys is, “And how is it working out so far?”

You can imagine the answers we hear. The practice that was supposed to provide them freedom, independence and control is providing high levels of stress and frustration, long hours (60-70 hour weeks), clients that don’t pay well, administrative
and management functions they didn’t bargain for, marketing responsibilities on top of everything else, no time off (no time period), dealing with payroll every week, constant interruptions, frozen or declining incomes, unpredictable cash flow, high levels of responsibility and liability, and a life out of balance.

Albert Einstein once said, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Think about that for a moment.

There is a comic line that goes, “You may be a redneck if…” Well, “You may be insane if…you walk into your building, turn on the lights, go into your office, sit behind your desk, flick on the computer, begin your workday the same as yesterday and somehow believe that today you are going to go home on time; today you are going to get your work done without frequent interruptions; today you can plan that big vacation.” That somehow, magically, today is the day that you will get different results than you have in the past, using the same old methods you have always used.

The point is: the frustrations you are experiencing on a daily basis are not going to go away - not until you make some fundamental changes. You see the model that you are following is broken. That is really what the Atticus Practice Builder is all about, giving you a new model for the law firm, one that gives you control over your income, freedom, and a renewed appreciation for the practice of law.

UNDERSTANDING THE FATAL ASSUMPTION

Michael Gerber is a small business guru who wrote a very good book entitled, The E-Myth Revisited. We highly recommend this book. In it he lays out a case for the fatal assumption that most business owners make. Here we are going to translate that into the fatal assumption as it applies to law firms.

So, let’s start with a question for you. Who starts a medical practice? Doctors, of course. Who starts accounting firms? Yes, CPA’s. And, who starts a law firm? Lawyers. What do all of these professionals have in common, the doctor, the CPA, and the lawyer, is that they invested a great deal of time, energy, and money developing the technical skills and abilities they thought they would need to be successful.

THE FATAL ASSUMPTION

Here’s the kink in this system, the attorney just wants to do the legal work, and that is all. That seems pretty harmless, doesn’t it? If all other responsibilities would go away, the attorney would be very happy. He could finally get his work done.

Unfortunately, the management functions (time management, marketing, staffing, and cash flow) are the exact skills that allow the attorney to get the work done, at
least with any kind of freedom. Most attorneys perceive these management and ownership responsibilities as distractions from doing the legal work. So here is how we describe the fatal assumption for attorneys.

This is a fatal assumption, because the business (the law firm) that’s supposed to free you starts to enslave you. Eventually you feel trapped. This trap is set very slowly and innocently. It starts with a statement that may sound familiar to you. “I can’t get all my work done during the day, mostly because there are so many interruptions. So I need to work evenings. And if that is not enough, I will come in on Saturdays. And if Saturdays are not enough, I will do whatever it takes, Sundays if necessary.”

After a while the legal technician in us starts to accept this situation and, after a few more years, it seems fairly normal. The technician starts missing more and more time with family. She stops exercising. She stops taking real vacations. Then to secure this rationale in her mind, the attorney starts to believe that nobody but nobody is as competent as she is. She tried delegating and the client is unhappy. She has delegated the work product to others and it never fails, she ends up staying late to correct someone else’s mistakes. So the attorney starts believing, truly believing, that everybody else is basically incompetent, or doesn’t care, and that it is just easier to do the work herself. It’s a slow, but devastating trap.

**THE THREE CRITICAL ROLES OF SUCCESS**

We must always respect and honor the legal skills necessary to run a law firm, but we also must acknowledge that the day you decided to become a partner or to start your own firm; you adopted three roles. Granted, no one told you about the other two roles, but nevertheless you own them.

The first role is that of the technician with the skills to do the legal work in the firm. Second, you took on the role of manager, the person who has to coordinate the production of the technical work with marketing, staffing, and cash flow. And the third role you took on was owner, who is responsible for the vision and the liabilities. When you started your firm, whether you like it or not, you took on the other two roles of owner and manager in addition to the technician role.

**ARE YOU BUILDING A JOB OR A LAW FIRM?**

The attorney who uses the traditional model to develop his practice isn’t building a business; he is building a job; one that requires an hour in for every dollar out; one that produces an income not a profit; one that requires him to work harder and harder with fewer and fewer returns. Most attorneys are building a job and, if you think about it, not such a great job. When the technician attorney tries to take time off, so goes
the revenue. In the traditional law firm model, where the technician rules the roost, the only way to earn more money for most is to work more hours. There are limited growth opportunities and little value being built. Go ahead and try to sell your business – even to your partners, it’s hard because you are the business in your current model.

NAIL IN THE COFFIN

The good news doesn’t stop there. The proverbial “nail in the coffin” for the lawyer/technician is dramatic changes in the business of law. Supply and demand of legal services, advancing technology, unauthorized practicing of law; multidisciplinary practices, regulatory shifts and changing client expectations are just some of the challenges facing attorneys in our modern age. We could debate and argue each of these changes and how they impact your practice, but let’s just talk about the first change we mentioned: the supply and demand of legal services.

Here are the economic realities of the legal profession. In 1968 there were 168,000 licensed attorneys in the United States and demand for legal services was higher than supply. In those economic conditions you just had to be a good lawyer to succeed.

By 1987 the number of attorneys had grown from 168,000 to 600,000; and by 1995 the number was over 900,000 attorneys. As we sit here today, our country has crossed the 1,200,000 mark of licensed attorneys; or 1 attorney for every 340 Americans – man, woman, and child.

As the supply of attorneys entering the profession increases, we have partners staying longer because they are not able to retire. At the same time, we’re graduating 36,000 new law students every year. And we’re going to tell you, we’ve seen the highest levels of the ABA and Bar Associations, and there’s no one putting controls on the number of people entering the profession.

In economic terms there has been a shift. Post-’80s, we have what economists call a mature market for legal services, where the supply of lawyers exceeds the demand for services. And in that economic condition, when supply of lawyers exceeds demand, clients are in control. Without debating all the other issues facing the legal profession – client expectations, multi-disciplinary practices, or regulatory shifts - the economic challenges alone should help you understand that it is time to make a change.

THE DEAD HORSE

Charlie Robinson, a very popular futurist and Elder Law Attorney in Tampa shared a Dakota Indian tribal wisdom with me. The tribal wisdom goes like this: When you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to get off the dead horse.
He went on to point out that law firms would try every other possible strategy before they will get off the horse. They try whipping the horse – you can always work a little harder and you can try to get your partners (associates, paralegal, staff) to work harder. Then if you can’t do that, you change riders to get the horse moving. Get rid of the lazy partners, the paralegals, and the associates who can’t keep up. What’s the matter with them, they don’t want to work 80 hours? Or partners say things like, “You don’t understand, this is the way we’ve always ridden dead horses around here. The partner before me did it this way - this is 150-year-old firm – this is the way we’ve always done it.” Some firms get more sophisticated and appoint a committee to study the dead horse. And if you get even more sophisticated, you start arranging to visit other firms – to see how they ride their dead horse. And here’s the epitome of how to ride a dead horse: merging your dead horses with another firm’s dead horse to see how fast they will go together.

THE TRADITIONAL LAW FIRM MODEL IS BROKEN

It would appear that business as usual is no longer an option. We suppose you could close the doors and get another job. You could go to work for another law firm.

The only problem there is that the other law firms are using the same broken model you were working with. What we’re suggesting here is that you have no choice. In this profession the only option is to re-engineer your law firm, go to work ‘on’ the firm instead of just working ‘in’ it.

At the Atticus Practice Builder, we are going to offer you a replacement for the traditional law firm model. We are going to share with you seven steps to re-engineer the firm to better serve your life. When you complete the Atticus Practice Builder, you can either apply the new model or discard it... the choice will be yours.

Our question for you: Are you ready for a change?

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRACTICE BUILDER IS THE KEY.

We imagine you have attended numerous CLE programs in your professional life. And some of those seminars dealt with the issues of time management, marketing, cash flow and other topics covered by the Atticus Practice Builder. But when the seminar ended and you went back to your practice; were you able to apply what you learned to significantly change your practice or your life? If you are like most of us, the answer is no. This is quite normal. So, the logical question is this: How is the Atticus Practice Builder different from other seminars?
The answer is implementation. Attorneys who implement the concepts they learn at the Atticus Practice Builder see a 32.5% increase in revenues in the first year AND a 10% - 25% decrease in the amount of time they spend in the office. They consistently report that they are more satisfied with the practice of law and that their clients are better cared for. How can you make your experience at the Practice Builder pay off for you? How can you get a dramatic return on your investment? And what is the key to implementation? Accountability.

Imagine attending a two-day golf workshop where the training is not done on the golf course but in a classroom using a workbook instead of a 4-iron. You finish the workshop and return home to your busy life, eager to apply what you have learned in the classroom. But out on the links, everything is different and over the next year, how much do you think your golf game would change? Not very much.

Exactly for this reason, we have structured four weeks of follow-up support coaching into the Atticus Practice Builder. When you leave the Practice Builder you will not be alone. We are going to stay with you; keeping you on track and helping you apply what you have learned. And the good news? It is included in the Practice Builder tuition fee.

For some attorneys, four weeks of follow up will not be enough. They will want more: more accountability, more follow-through, more results. Twenty-five years of listening to the needs of attorneys has allowed Atticus to create our exclusive Practice Growth Program (PGP). The PGP is built on the shoulders of hundreds of success stories and by applying what we have learned from the mistakes of other firms. It is built on the concept of the best practices and has helped law firms just like yours to re-engineer their practice.

Your success is in your hands. The time for change is now. If you continue to do the same old thing, you will continue to get the same old results. If you dramatically alter your experience, then you can dramatically alter your outcome. Isn’t it time to invest in the future you dreamed about? You have taken the first step and we applaud your efforts. We look forward to sharing the journey with you and watching your practice and your life exceed your expectations.