



## Long live the general practitioner

I say general practice is not dead. I am ashamed to admit that for a fleeting moment in my own practice, I came to conclusion that the business of a general law practice was dead; that one could not expect to make a real living as a general practitioner. I was wrong on so many levels. Now, when a client asks me what type of law I practice, I am not ashamed to explain that I can solve all types of problems—both legal and nonlegal.

In my mind, the general practitioner—of course, a skilled and caring general practitioner—should be one of, if not the most, highly regarded of our profession. Truly unlike any other profession known to man, ours requires one to possess and strive to refine the skill to evaluate and understand risk; to mediate and negotiate compromise; to identify and coordinate outside resources; and, when necessary, to advocate in any adversarial context. Friends and clients rely on us for advice on all sorts of nonlegal problems, for instance: advice on treatment for ill or drug-addicted loved ones; for guidance on where to find funding for a child's college education; or for a roadmap to find financing to grow a family business. For this reason, the general practice of law will endure. Without general practitioners, a truly precious community resource would be lost.

John DiJulius, the Ohio-based customer service consultant, advises in his book, *Secret Service*, that “people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Therein is the key to making a real living as a “general specialist.” General practitioners have unique opportunities to meet with persons from a broad demographic and to aid them with all sorts of life challenges. More to the point, they have a unique opportunity to learn about these people and their families, as well as their problems—as opposed to just learning about their case. With this information, we build relationships that will both better lives and build business.

In *Secret Service*, DiJulius describes his relationship with his life insurance advisor:

Larry knows the secret to making people want to do business with him. He talks about what interests them and about how to help them get what they want. He doesn't spend any time talking about what interests him or what he wants.

Larry just turned 75. What's the secret to his success? He says, “If you have a client who needs a job, then help him with a resume and introduce him to your contacts. If you know someone who is looking for funds, then introduce him to potential investors. If you know someone who is looking for an employee, then help him find a key person. If you know someone who is looking for a loan, then fix him up with a banker. **Be a resource for people. Learn to help people first, long before you ever ask for the sale.**”<sup>1</sup>

This can be challenging and I most certainly failed at it more than most. It is non-billable time ... for now. And, on the off chance making someone's life better or solving a stranger's problem does not lead to business—we still made someone's life better or solved a stranger's problem. That is after all, our mission. ♦



By Joseph R. Klammer, Esq., president of the Lake County Bar Association.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>DiJulius, John. *Secret Service: Hidden Systems that Deliver Unforgettable Customer Service*, p. 47-48 (2003).