

LAW OFFICE MANAGEMENT: BEST PRACTICES FOR LAW CLINICS

KENECHUKWU AGWU, ESQ.

LAW LECTURER & CLINICAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR

FACULTY OF LAW,

BAZE UNIVERSITY ABUJA

OUTLINE

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Definition of terms

Law Office:

- - a law office is an an office maintained by a lawyer or a firm of lawyers for the practice of law

A Law Clinic:

- - A legal clinic is a legal aid or law school program providing services to various clients and often hands-on-legal experience to law school students. Clinics are usually directed by clinical professors. Legal clinics typically do pro bono work in a particular area, providing free legal services to clients.
- It is the law office for clinicians
- A law clinic is equivalent to a teaching hospital

Talking Points

Law Clinics Vs Law Offices

Types of Law Office

- There are three classifications of types of law offices;
 - 1. Small office
 - 2. Medium office
 - 3. Large office



Criteria for assessing the type of law office

- 1. Space occupied by the law office: a large office should have enough space to accommodate the legal practitioners, a reception, conference room, toilet, library, kitchen, etc.
- 2. The type of facility owned by the office: these include the office machines and equipments, research materials, stationeries and supplies, etc.
- 3. Number of legal practitioners: where there are many legal practitioners in a firm, there is greater specialization. Small offices are prone to being jack-of-all trade, master of none. In the United States and England, there are law offices having over 100 partners and another 50 non-legal staff.
- 4. Experience of the legal practitioners in active legal practice. this may be calculated on the basis of five - ten – fifteen years post call. Having a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, and Notary Public in a law office is added advantage
- 5. Quality of the support staff: large law offices have qualified staff: office manager, librarian, accountant, receptionist, etc. Kind of clients: the quality of clients determines the level of experience and activity of the legal practitioners in the office

Ownership
Structure
of a Law
Office

Sole Proprietor

Sole practitioner

Associateship

Partnership

Considerations for a law office

- Location:
 - The location of a law office is usually dependent on the availability of funds and the kind of practice
 - A law office should not be located in a noisy area because of distractions: Some legal practitioners have theirs located within their residence. Such law offices have the advantage of proximity and flexibility of working hours, but the disadvantage is that there could be distractions from the family
- Office layout
 - 1.Reception / waiting room.
 - 2. Legal Practitioners offices.
 - 3.Support staff offices.
 - 4.Conference room.
 - 5. Library.
 - 6. Kitchen.
 - 7. Toilet.

- Staff

- There are two categories of office staff.
 - 1. Legal practitioners: they may be partners, associates, or employees.
 - 2. Support staff: these are non-lawyers like the secretary, manager, receptionist, driver, and office assistant.
- Staff selection obtainable in other offices. It may be by means of.
 - 1. adverts placed in the newspapers,
 - 2. Attestation or recommendation by a colleague or team member places
 - Recruitment agencies or consultants.
- Every staff should have a contract of employment setting out the conditions of service:. Newly employed staff of the office should be educated by way of induction about the firm, existing clients files, work ethics, administrative procedure, and existing staff, this will help them to settle down to work quickly.

Office manual & Office Administration:

- Office Manual is a document that contains matters relating to the internal administration of the office. It is like a brochure that contains matters such as the rules and procedures that regulate work and performance of tasks in the office. Some of the matters in the Manual are also contained in the contract of employment, namely:
 - Working hours.
 - Overtime work.
 - Absence and lateness.
 - Holidays.
- Annual Leave.
- Salary increment, advancement and bonus
- Reporting structure
- organogram
- File management
- Provision of Office stationeries
- Dealing with clients.
- Dealing with correspondence.
- Confidentiality of Work.
- Dealing with office books.
- Training and conferences.
- Disciplinary procedure.
- Grievance procedure

Office equipment, machines and stationeries

- Law office equipment, machines and stationeries in a cash-based economy like Nigeria, most law offices acquire their equipment by purchase. In a credit economy, it is usual for law offices to lease equipment, which is paid for by installment payment.
- Types of office machine:
 - Generator.
 - Vehicles.

Types of office equipment

- Typewriter.
- Photocopying machine.
- Fire proof safe.
- Dictating Machine.
- Rubber Stamp.
- Telephone.
- Answering Machine.
- Facsimile Machine.
- Computer / e-mail, internet facilities.
- Shredder.

Types of office stationeries

- Business cards.
- Letterhead paper.
- Continuation Sheet.
- File jackets.
- Office Forms.
- Legal Forms.
- Note papers.
- Others such as ribbons, envelopes, staple pins, paper clips, note pads, etc

Time management

- Whatever we did or failed to do in the year remains Forever done or left undone in that year.
- One beautiful thing about time is that it passes, never to return. cannot be recalled, run after or overtaken. You can choose to use, misuse, or completely waste it, but you can never bring it back.
- We advise that the only way for you to make better use of your working time is to analyze how you use it now, and then to consider ways in which you can reallocate it in a more efficient way. Here are some suggestions on ways to improve on your time management:
 - Dairy or organizer: it is good practice to start your working day by having a quick look at you dairy or organizer to see the list of things to do; these are the business of the day. The main advantage of the dairy or organizer is that it helps you to remember the things to be done and in what order. Every lawyer has a phone and most phones have facility by which you can organise your daily activities

- Delegate tasks: Ability to delegate is a skill very important in the management of a law office.
- Action plan: design an action plan that holds you and your staff accountable for beating procrastination and using their time effectively.
- Challenges of poor time management
 - 1. You end up doing work that should be done by others.
 - 2. Jobs will begin to take a longer time than expected.
 - 3. You do not have enough time to be creative and innovative.
 - 4. Poor time management leads to stress at work.
- ***Self assessment test on time management****See how well you manage your time by responding to these statements and scoring yourself.

Filing system

- This is an aspect of record keeping
- Files must be contained in a way to grant you access. All outgoing and incoming correspondents must be properly filed.
- Correspondences may be filed according to the subject matter, for example, a letter with Ref. No: SI/S/01/2013
- There are two ways of keeping files:
 - 1. Manual - paper form: use an alphabetical or subject-order system.
 - 2. Electronic system.
- File index and register: large offices have many files, for easy access and tracing, they use the file index and file movement register. A challenge that must be addressed as the office grows is what to do with old files or closed files? Certainly, there can be, space to keep closed files forever. This is one of the advantages of the electronic system, you can store more files in the computer for a longer period

Law Office Records

- Every law office should keep record of its activities for proper management.
- Here are some of the usual record books:
 - Case diary: litigation.
 - Office manual.
 - Staff register.
 - Files with file index.
 - Equipments and machines register.
 - Books, journals, periodical, seminar papers register.
 - Closed filed register.
 - Clients telephone directory.
 - Incoming and outgoing correspondence register.
 - Telephone book.
 - Visitor's book.
 - Minute book.

Let's Talk About the Law Clinic