

# Going Solo



**The decision to start a small or solo law firm usually hinges on a mix of logic and intuition — and a dash of the unexpected. We asked alumni to what degree their startup was planned and to what degree chance was a factor.**

## Do What You Love

Partnership was not on the radar for Scott Dunham '94. He says it was more of a natural progression. He originally clerked at a firm that did personal injury and loved the variety. After switching from a large to mid-size to small firm, solo practice was the natural next step. His practice area also lent itself to solo practice. He remarks, "Personal injury tends to be more entrepreneurial, since you only make money if you win the case."

## Know Thyself — and Thy Clients!

For Lori-jean Gille '79, a key career motivation that led to starting her own firm was her desire for in-depth knowledge about a business area. Securities practice at a large firm, jumping from client to client, frustrated her. After holding general counsel positions at an HMO management company and a pharmaceutical company, a chance meeting led to project work for a former law school

colleague. She liked being independent and focusing on a select client basis and now specializes in representing pharmaceutical and device companies. She says, "It's much easier to give good legal advice if you really understand the business."

## Trust Your Gut — and Sometimes — the Guy on the Barstool

Tom Plunkett '95 always wanted his own practice as a criminal defense attorney, even before graduating from William Mitchell. However, chance connections led him to a job at a mid-size firm, which he enjoyed so much he stayed for eight years, instead of the two he envisioned. After drinks one night with a seasoned criminal attorney and a street-savvy private investigator, he realized he needed to make the leap. Four years later, he says, "It's been a lot more hours, a lot more hassles, and a lot more fun. On occasion, there's a little extra money, too."

## Honor Your Values

To add to her experience in clinical psychology, Audra Holbeck '00 knew she wanted her own family law practice someday. "But," she writes, "I quickly discovered that litigation and family law go hand-in-hand." Repelled by the mudslinging and nasty affidavits she encountered in family law, she

looked for a more effective, diplomatic approach to divorce, which she found with collaborative law. Clients liked the idea of staying out of court, which inspired her to start her own collaborative practice. Her practice now keeps divorcing parents out of the courtroom and helps them stay focused on their children, goals, and values.

## Trust Harmony

Fate played a hand when Jeff Gram '04 and Jeremy Greenhouse '03 met on their first day of law school. The two had a lot in common—both had graduate degrees in music and had worked as professional musicians. They became fast friends and ended up playing in the same band—the Sweet Colleens. After graduating, they became associates at major law firms but experienced frustration with the lack of client contact and oversight and the long hours. The two decided to leave their big-firm jobs and hang out a shingle. Greenhouse & Gram was born June 1, 2006. ✖

— Cynthia Miller

*Please let us know if there are subjects you would like to see explored in this Small Practice column and if you would be willing to share your perspective. Email [magazine@wmitchell.edu](mailto:magazine@wmitchell.edu).*