

Barrister Business

The essential guide to the business of
being a barrister and how to maximise
your potential

Don Turner

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Don Turner established a specialist training business in 2013, following a long and varied career in technical services and strategic marketing management. From that foundation, Practice Management Excellence Training (PME Training) was created; a brand that quickly became the leading provider of management and professional development training for the barristers' chambers sector.

PME is focused exclusively on supporting barristers' chambers. Since its beginning, PME has delivered training programmes, one-to-one coaching, and consultancy projects to sets across England and Wales. Over the years, Don has worked with professionals at every level of chambers' life - from junior tenants and pupils to senior clerks, chambers' directors, and heads of chambers - covering topics such as networking, business development, relationship-building, personal branding, presentation skills, staff management, leadership, and chambers strategy.

Don has earned a strong reputation for being creative, pragmatic, and engaging which has driven the success of PME training to become the industry's primary training provider for practice teams.

In 2022, PME Training launched a suite of industry-specific training courses for the Institute of Barristers' Clerks (IBC), recognised by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), programmes which continue to be developed and delivered by PME to this day.

Through countless training sessions, interviews, surveys, and one-to-one coaching conversations, Don has had the privilege of hearing the real concerns, ambitions, and day-to-day challenges of hundreds of clerks and countless barristers. This book is a response to those conversations;

a collection of practical insights, ideas, and reflections designed to support the practice development of barristers working within chambers.

For more information, visit:

www.barristerbusiness.co.uk

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Introduction

There is no shortage of information about becoming a barrister; from navigating pupillage to understanding the law, regulations, and professional standards. But what is often missing is practical guidance on how to build a successful practice. What can you actually do to influence your professional pathway and stand out in your field of expertise?

This book seeks to address that gap.

A common comment from senior clerks and chambers directors is that pupils and new tenants (or even with a good few years of call under their belts) don't always have a clear grasp of the practicalities of chambers life, especially when it comes to business development, managing expectations in practice development meetings or the fundamentals of being self-employed.

Chambers is a very particular working environment. It's built around self-employment, and most new barristers enter the profession without any previous business experience. While you may be an expert in law (or developing your profession), you're also setting out as a business owner, and that's a learning curve in itself.

This book has been written from research and interviews with a range of people across the sector. Not just barristers, but also clerks, practice managers, consultants and others with a wealth of experience in the business side of the profession. The goal is to give you a head start on lessons that others often had to learn the hard way or help you sharpen your current skills as a member of the Bar.

This isn't a book about the law. It's not about regulation, and it's certainly not a list of rights and wrongs. It's about *you*, as an individual. It's about your practice, your chambers, your career, and how, by reflecting on your current approach and making small, manageable adjustments, you may achieve better results - both professionally and personally.

The aim is to make this book insightful, practical, engaging and suitable for the self-employed person who is time-poor. Whether you are a student, a pupil, a newly qualified member of chambers, or someone who would just like some more insights into how to build your practice, these five sections should be of value to you. The eclectic mix of topics covered in the chapters reflect common themes that regularly arise in conversations with both members and practice management across the chambers' sector. They address frequent frustrations and misconceptions which come up time and time again, offering insight and practical guidance for those facing similar challenges.

There will be plenty of simple ideas in these pages that you already know. But just as importantly, there will be familiar concepts you *know*; yet don't *do*. The aim of this book isn't to dazzle you with new theories, but to help you place a different level of importance on things you may have overlooked. Sometimes, it's not about learning something new, it's about seeing the value in doing what you already know, consistently and with purpose.

This information does not instruct you in what to do. It does not promise riches and power. It offers concepts and approaches, but it's up to you to decide what fits your world and how to apply it in your own particular circumstances. There's no single 'right' way to build or

develop a practice, what works for one person may not suit another. One thing is certain though: you didn't come to the Bar to become a salesperson. Balancing professional advocacy with the demands of business development is no small task. We hope this book helps make that balance a little easier to strike.

As a barrister, your focus is often on the law, the client, and the court. Time is short. Reflection can feel like a luxury. But if you want to build a successful and sustainable practice, how you manage your relationships, your time, your communication, and your personal brand matters just as much (some may say even more) as your legal ability.

Almost without exception, senior barristers' clerks will tell you that the most successful barristers are not just technically excellent. They are commercially aware, easy to work with, and highly proficient in soft skills.

These qualities set you apart from the competition. They make your practice smoother, your working relationships stronger, and your diary more secure. Simply put when you're good to work with, you get re-instructed. And when that happens, you're not constantly chasing new business, the work comes to you.

Getting the most from this book

To get the most from this book, consider the following:

1. Read with intent, not just interest

Make notes. Highlight passages. Mark anything that prompts a reaction; whether it resonates, irritates, or challenges you. Self-awareness often starts with noticing where you feel uncomfortable or you realise that you just do enough of something.

2. Take it in stages

You don't need to read it cover to cover in one sitting. Treat each section as a short exercise in reflection. Think about how the ideas relate to your current working life, with clients, clerks, solicitors, and your wider chambers network.

3. Focus on what's actionable

You're not expected to change everything overnight. But if one paragraph helps you manage your time better, improve your client rapport, or rethink how you present yourself in a meeting: that's progress. Pick one or two ideas from each section and try them out in chambers or even in court.

4. Use it as a prompt for conversation

Whether with your clerk, your supervisor, a junior, or a colleague over lunch, use this book as a talking point. What do others see in you that you might not see in yourself? Self-development doesn't need to be a solo pursuit, use others to gain insight.

5. Return to it as your practice evolves

Some parts of this book may not apply right now, but they will later. As your seniority grows, your business challenges will change. Keep the book nearby. It's designed to grow with you.

Reading this book is a personal journey and each reader will see something different in the words, just remember; every barrister is different. Every chambers is different. Every clerk is different. Every professional client is different. Every lay client is different. Your success lies in understanding those differences and knowing how best to adapt.