

THE 2026 GUIDE FOR AUSTRALIAN LAWYERS

Going Solo

How to set up and run your own legal practice in Australia.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"I would have started a lot earlier."

JOSH WATTS, RUN IT BY LEGAL

BY CLARENCE, THE ONLY WORKSPACE IN AUSTRALIA CREATED BY LAWYERS, FOR LAWYERS
BRISBANE · MELBOURNE · SYDNEY · [CLARENCEWORKSPACES.COM.AU](https://clarenceworkspaces.com.au)

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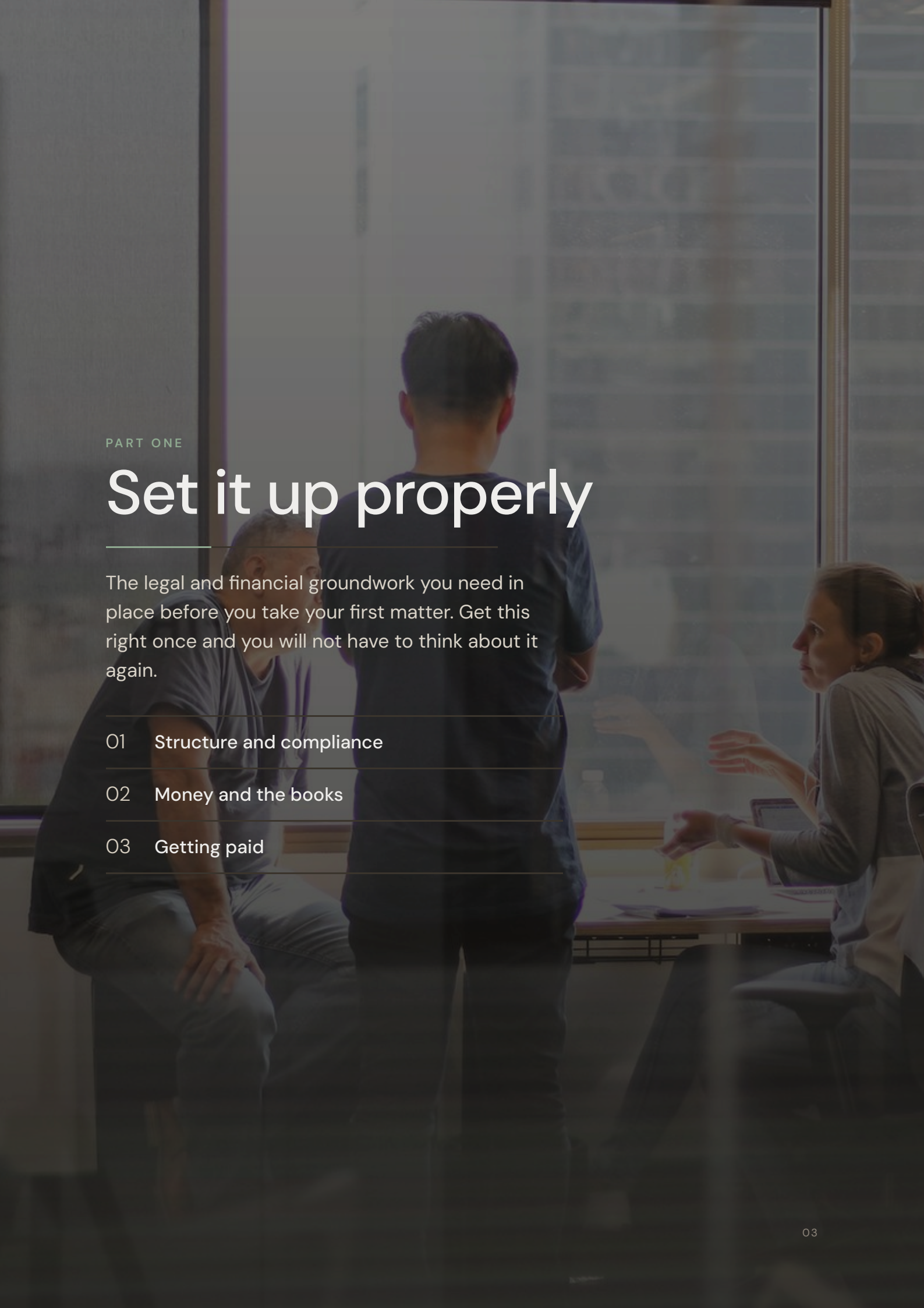
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PART ONE

Set it up properly

The legal and financial groundwork you need in place before you take your first matter. Get this right once and you will not have to think about it again.

01 Structure and compliance

02 Money and the books

03 Getting paid

Choose your structure

Your structure sets your tax, your liability and how easily you can change course later. Decide it before you take instructions, not after.



YOUR OPTIONS

- **Sole practitioner.** Cheapest and simplest to run, and easy to change later.
- **Partnership.** Shared costs and shared liability.
- **Incorporated legal practice.** Limited liability and clearer tax planning. Most new firms go here.
- **Multi-disciplinary partnership.** Lets you offer services beyond law.
- **Chambers or serviced model.** You stay independent, someone else runs the office.

WHAT YOU NEED FIRST

- **A principal practising certificate.** The one that allows you to run your own practice.
- **Professional indemnity insurance.** Approved under the Uniform Law.
- **Trust money rules.** Know them before you hold a cent.
- **Your obligations as a principal.** Worth a refresher even if you have been practising twenty years.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"I would have started as a consultant, not a principal."

Chris Toogood, Ancora Lawyers

Work out the number before you need it

In a recent survey of 318 Clarence members, starting out short was named as the biggest regret. Know what the first year costs and have more than that.



WHAT YOU NEED MONEY FOR

- **Registration and insurance.** Practising certificate, professional indemnity, business registration.
- **Somewhere to work.** A lease, a serviced office or a desk.
- **Technology.** Practice management, research, email, phones.
- **Getting found.** Branding, a website, your first marketing.
- **You.** Enough to live on until the fees land.

GET THE BOOKS RIGHT

- **A general account, and a trust account if you hold client money.** Set up to your state's rules.
- **Cloud accounting from day one.** Not a spreadsheet you will outgrow.
- **A bookkeeper who knows law practices.** They exist and they are worth it.
- **Your reporting dates in the diary.** External examination included.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"Inject more capital at the start, so everything is done properly instead of chasing your tail while you work."

Marina Michael, Alethia Legal

Profitable practices still run out of money

The gap between doing the work and being paid for it is where the pain sits. It is a systems problem and it has practical answers.



GET PAID SOONER

- **Bill on a fixed cycle.** Not when you find time.
- **Ask for money up front.** Where the work allows it.
- **Offer fixed fees.** Where you can scope the matter properly.
- **Make paying easy.** Card, online, and a link in the invoice.

KEEP THE GAP SMALL

- **Watch work in progress.** As closely as you watch the bank balance.
- **Follow up early.** Early and polite beats late and awkward.
- **Keep a buffer.** Enough to cover fixed costs for a few months.
- **Know your break-even.** Check it monthly.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"Set up your admin properly, and charge much more than you think."

Hilary Kincaid, Kincaid Legal

PART TWO

Find your clients

Where the work comes from, and how to make sure it keeps coming. This is the part most people postpone and then wish they had not.

04 Your plan and your niche

05 Marketing and branding

06 Business development

Decide who you are for

A plan gives you something to measure against, and a bank will ask for one anyway. Keep it short enough that you will actually use it.



WHAT GOES IN IT

- **Why you are doing this.** And how it fits the life you want.
- **Your goals.** Money, work and lifestyle, across one, two and five years.
- **Your market.** Who your client is, how many there are, who else serves them.
- **Your edge.** What makes you the better choice for that client.
- **Your numbers.** What you will offer, what you will charge, what it takes to profit.

MAKE IT USEFUL

- **Block out an hour.** Break it up if a blank page feels like a lot.
- **Keep it where you can see it.** Use it to make decisions, not to fill a drawer.
- **Revisit it as you grow.** It is a living document.
- **Pick a niche, and hold it loosely.** Focused firms have the clearest run at a market, and you can widen later.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"Don't niche down so quickly."

Martin Richardson, Risk Collective Legal

Start before you need the work

Marketing is how people who need you find out you exist. Many of the lawyers we surveyed named this as their regret, and every one of them said they should have started sooner.



THE BASICS

- **A name you will still like in five years.**
Including the domain.
- **A website that answers three things.**
What you do, who for, how to reach you.
- **Plain-language services and pricing.**
Written for a client, not a colleague.
- **A profile that looks like a practice.**
Not like someone between jobs.

WHAT ACTUALLY MOVES WORK

- **Be findable.** Learn enough about search to come up for the thing you do.
- **Be useful in public.** Write about the questions clients actually ask.
- **Show up on LinkedIn.** Regularly, in the conversations your clients are already in.
- **Ask happy clients for reviews.** A recommendation beats any advertisement.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"Figure out your marketing strategy earlier."

Jemima Sim, Voce Legal

Look after the relationships that bring you work

Most of your early work comes from people who already know you. The job is making sure they know what you do now.



WHERE TO START

- **Tell your network you have started.** Individually, not in a post.
- **Keep a list of who sends you matters.** It is a better guide than a feeling.
- **Join a professional community.** Shared workspaces and networks create referrals.
- **Get comfortable saying “I can help with that”.** Selling is helping.

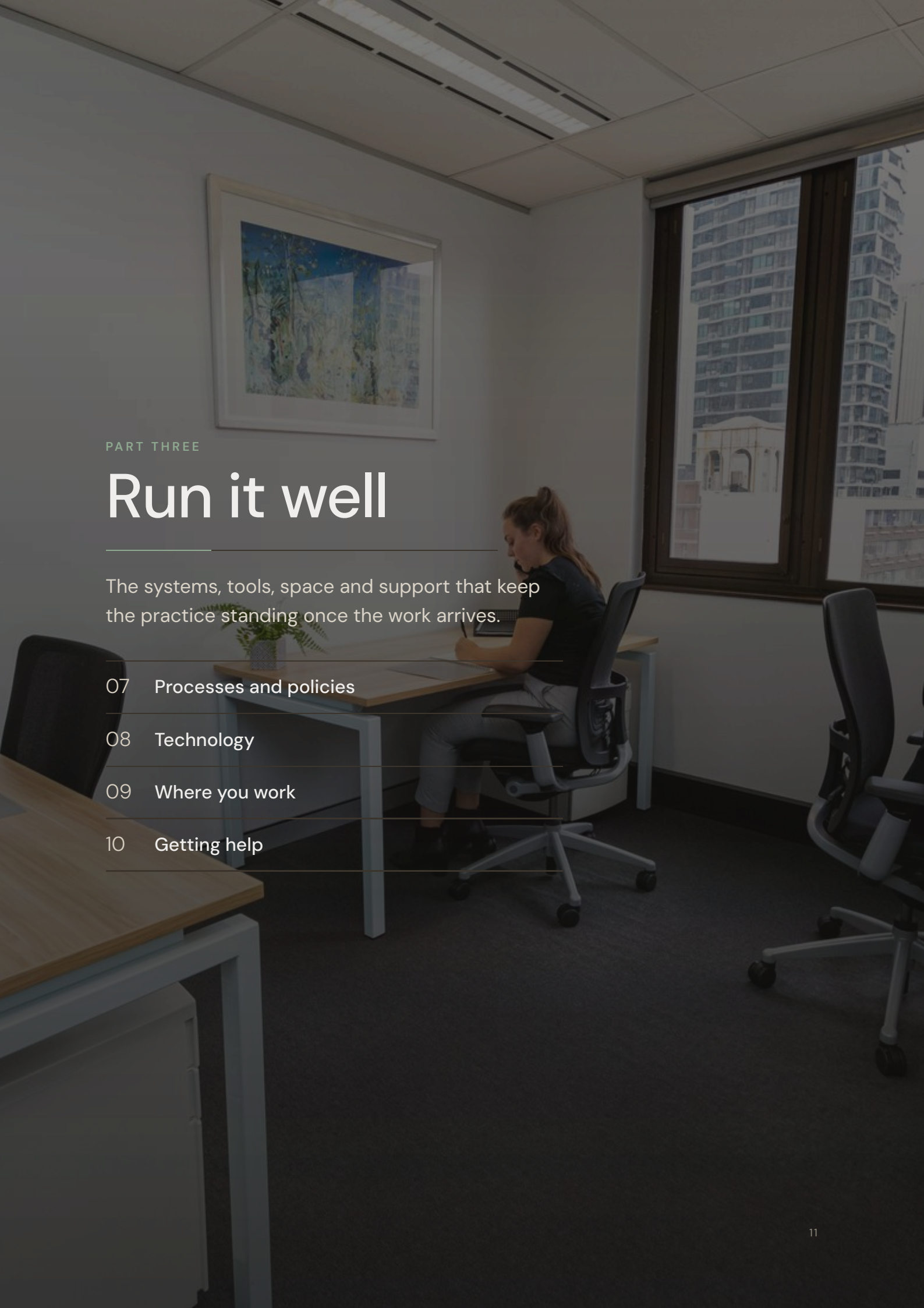
KEEP IT GOING

- **Follow up the people who referred once.** They usually will again.
- **Be visible where your referrers are.** Not where your competitors are.
- **Give referrals to get them.** It works and it is not complicated.
- **Make it easy to send you work.** A clear scope and a fast reply.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

“Have a better established network in place before you start.”

Mark Mathews, Mathews Tax Lawyers



PART THREE

Run it well

The systems, tools, space and support that keep the practice standing once the work arrives.

07 Processes and policies

08 Technology

09 Where you work

10 Getting help

Write down how you do things

Documented processes protect your quality, keep you compliant and stop you solving the same problem twice.



PROCESSES TO DOCUMENT

- Matter management and file handling.
- Billing and financial management.
- Client onboarding and communication.
- Your precedent library.
- A central record of undertakings, complaints and key dates.

POLICIES TO HAVE

- Conflicts of interest.
- Internet and social media use.
- Training and CPD compliance.
- Confidentiality, security and privacy.
- Workplace conduct and anti-discrimination.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

“Establish stronger internal systems from the start.”

Jason Goyal, Resolve Employment Lawyers

Start with the problem, not the tool

The right tools save you time and cut your risk. Work out what you are trying to fix before you buy anything.



WHAT YOU NEED

- **Practice management.** Files, billing and trust accounting in one cloud system.
- **Legal research.** On a plan that suits a small practice.
- **Communication.** Video meetings and secure file sharing are the baseline clients expect.

WHAT TO ADD

- **Document automation.** Takes the error out of routine drafting.
- **AI tools.** Useful for research, review and first drafts. Keep a human across the output.
- **Cybersecurity.** Strong passwords, two-factor authentication and encryption. Not optional.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"Better software from the start."

Flo Mitchell, FM Legal

Pick a workspace that reflects your brand

Where you work shapes your costs and what clients think of you. Choose a workspace that is professional, where your clients will be looked after and that doesn't lock you in.



WHAT TO WEIGH

- **What clients expect.** And whether they will meet you at all.
- **Your real monthly cost.** Including the parts a lease does not show.
- **The space you will need in two years.** Not this month.
- **What it costs to leave.** If the practice changes shape.

YOUR OPTIONS

- **Home.** Cheapest, and the hardest to switch off from.
- **A lease.** Full control, full cost, longest commitment.
- **Chambers or a serviced office.** A professional address and meeting rooms without the fit-out.
- **Virtual.** An address and rooms when you need them, no daily desk.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

"Invest less in your own infrastructure and go with a serviced space."

Melissa Kirby, Sharpe & Abel

Know what to keep and what to hand over

At some point you will need another set of hands. Keep the client relationships and the strategy. Hand over the rest.



SIGNS IT IS TIME

- **You keep putting a task off.** Because you dread it.
- **It does not pay to do it yourself.** Your hourly rate says so.
- **It is outside your skill set.** Genuinely, not modestly.
- **You are the only one who knows how anything works.**

YOUR OPTIONS

- **Contractors.** For one-off projects like branding, IT or bookkeeping.
- **Freelancers.** For flexible, on-demand support.
- **Staff.** Part-time or full-time as the practice grows.
- **A serviced office.** Reception, IT and admin already included.

ANY REGRETS ABOUT GOING SOLO AS A LAWYER?

“Get a business coach from the beginning.”

Solon Hu, Royer Mace Lawyers

Sixteen things to tick off

SET IT UP PROPERLY

- ☐ Do you have the right practising certificate and insurance?

- ☐ Do you understand your obligations as a principal?

- ☐ Have you chosen your structure and registered your firm name?

- ☐ Do you have capital, or a plan to raise it?

- ☐ Are your trust and accounting systems set up?

- ☐ Have you settled on your billing model?

FIND YOUR CLIENTS

- ☐ Have you written a plan you will actually use?

- ☐ Do you know who you are for?

- ☐ Is your website live and does it say what you do?

- ☐ Have you told your network you have started?

- ☐ Do you know who has sent you a matter in the last year?

RUN IT WELL

- ☐ Have you started documenting your processes and policies?

- ☐ Have you chosen your software?

- ☐ Have you decided where you will work?

- ☐ Have you looked at chambers or serviced office options?

- ☐ Do you know what you will hand over first?

RESOURCES

Where to go next

YOUR LAW SOCIETY

- Law Society of NSW, lawsociety.com.au
- Law Institute of Victoria, liv.asn.au
- Queensland Law Society, qls.com.au
- Law Society of South Australia, lawsocietysa.asn.au
- Law Society of Western Australia, lawsocietywa.asn.au
- Law Society Northern Territory, lawsocietynt.asn.au
- Law Society of Tasmania, lst.org.au
- ACT Law Society, actlawsociety.asn.au

SETTING UP A BUSINESS

- Business.gov.au, starting a business guides
- Fair Work Ombudsman, hiring your first employee
- ATO, hiring workers and super for employers

PRACTICE AND RISK

- Legal Practitioners' Liability Committee, risk management
- Legal Services Council, Uniform Law resources

WHERE THE MEMBER QUOTES CAME FROM

Clarence member survey, 318 respondents, June 2026. The members quoted gave permission for their name and firm to be used.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO IT ALL YOURSELF

Everything that is not law, handled

The rewards of going out on your own are real, and so is the workload that has nothing to do with practising law.

Clarence has supported lawyers across Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney for 33 years. It is the only workspace in Australia created by lawyers, for lawyers: a professional CBD address, meeting rooms and reception, IT support, and a community of lawyers who understand the work.

"Clarence gave me the chance to start my own firm. Without its licence and cowork flexibility, I would have struggled to launch." Julian Walsh, Walsh & Walsh Lawyers · Brisbane

Book a tour of a Clarence workspace