



Your Unofficial Mentor for Launching a Firm: How Solo Practitioners Use CEB



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The challenge: 'You don't know what you don't know' when launching a solo practice

There's a certain amount of paranoia associated with being a solo practitioner — and for good reason. When every decision, from case strategy to business operations, rests on your shoulders, that responsibility and sense of isolation can lead to second-guessing and uncertainty.

"You don't know what you don't know," as California attorney Jake Pillard puts it, reflecting on his first few years as a solo practitioner. After passing the bar in 2020, he launched the Law Offices of Jake Pillard while renting space from a local attorney in Woodland.

Like most early-career attorneys, Jake relied heavily on referrals for his first clients. That brought its own set of challenges and learning opportunities, as his cases ranged from real estate and civil matters to criminal defense and constitutional law. As a general practitioner, Jake strove to help and add value whenever a potential client said, "Hey, I have a problem." But he was acutely aware that no attorney — even after years of experience — could be an expert in every area of law.

When solo practitioners encounter legal issues outside their primary area of expertise, it's crucial that they identify knowledge gaps quickly. If Jake failed to foresee all possible hurdles in an eviction proceeding, for example, that could result in his client starting the process all over again or having their case dismissed altogether. Add in the challenge of practicing in the most heavily regulated state with one of the largest populations in the country, ever-evolving laws and a deluge of new rulings emerging daily, and Jake felt like a tightrope walker navigating a field of landmines.

“It’s one thing to be familiar with the law but another to know about all the things that could potentially come back and bite you later on,” Jake said. “I needed to make sure I was dotting Is and crossing Ts. And while I have access to other attorneys, that doesn’t mean they’re up-to-date on all areas of California law.”

When Jake asked his network which legal resources they recommended, there was a reason why CEB kept coming up: it provides nuanced, county-specific guidance and analysis on multiple areas of law — all [created in collaboration](#) with some of California’s leading attorneys and judges. Eligible for a free trial, Jake decided to explore how the legal research tool could support his practice.

The approach: A California generalist’s handbook

Jake gravitated to CEB’s [Practice Guides](#) and [Secondary Sources](#), which provide detailed explainers, analysis, instructions, sample forms and checklists for handling legal matters across various practice areas, including business, employment, family, personal injury, real estate law and others. This armed him with a broader framework before delving into the intricate details of primary sources and solidified his understanding of the laws and procedures he was dealing with.

Using the Practice Guides is akin to having a mentor “who has thought of everything,” in Jake’s experience. Before consulting other attorneys for advice, he checks what CEB says to ensure he has a thorough understanding of the issues and procedures involved. For example, if a client is filing a probate lawsuit in Yolo County, Jake might start with an [overview](#) of California probate and trust litigation and then review the [county-specific pleading requirements](#), court procedures and any specific forms or filings required for the lawsuit.

“It’s like having a mentor there looking over your shoulder and saying ‘Did you do X, Y and Z?’ It’s a great way to catch errors and tease out issues you might not have known were there before you dive into a case,” Jake said. “Even if I’ve spent a lot of time double-checking, I never regret it because I’m better equipped for next time.”

Unlike national legal research databases with broad coverage, CEB zeroes in on California, allowing it to give attorneys more in-depth and specialized insights — without having to spend time sifting through irrelevant information.

Jake also leveraged CEB’s [DailyNews](#) to stay informed on the latest updates across more than 30 practice areas. With takeaways and practical insights for attorneys, it served as a real-time newsfeed and trendspotter as Jake navigated multiple practice areas. When California Assembly Bill 1950 shortened probation length for many felony and misdemeanor offenses in 2021, for example, he could keep tabs on the changes and their implications via CEB articles.



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“In a criminal case, that could be the difference between you asking for a continuance or not, if there’s an impact on sentencing,” Jake said.

Staying updated on new legislation, case law and procedural changes is always essential, but for solo practitioners operating without the resources of larger firms, cost-effective and comprehensive access to reliable and timely updates is critical.

Result: The confidence to say ‘Yes, I can help you’

Access to CEB’s resources was a practice-building game-changer as it gave Jake the confidence and support to take on new matters.

“When I had limited experience handling evictions and a client came to me with a legal issue, I used to hesitate. But because CEB has detailed guides on how to get the notices right, then I was more likely to say, ‘Yes, I can help you,’” Jake said.

In one lawsuit Jake filed, he wouldn’t have realized that he was in a position to secure a default judgment and seek punitive damages for his client if he hadn’t discovered this through a CEB guide. The resource outlined the separate notice necessary to pursue the default in a civil case, and this knowledge saved the case.

Now running a thriving practice with a diverse caseload — and even an argument before the Third District Court of Appeal under his belt, Jake has accumulated more experience than colleagues who took jobs at large firms and followed more conventional career paths. In that time, CEB has become so integral to Jake’s practice that it feels “mandatory” to him.

“Attorneys are so risk averse by training; we’re constantly looking out for our clients and our firms to ensure we avoid financial, legal and ethical pitfalls,” he said. “The best part is that you’re reading a guide written by an experienced, practicing California attorney who shares the same concerns and understands the nuances and practical realities.”



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