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LEGAL AUTHORITY

MAGAZINE

JANUARY 2027 · ISSUE 01 LEGALAUTHORITYMAGAZINE.COM



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ELEANOR WHITFIELD · FAMILY LAW & MEDIATION · ADMITTED IN TEXAS SINCE 1986 · AUSTIN

FORTY YEARS OF RETURNED CALLS

How an Austin family-law practice was built on one habit: every client call answered the same day. **Page 3**

EDITORIAL FEATURE · NOT AN ADVERTISEMENT

ISSUE 01 · WINTER 2027

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Every attorney in this issue was published in Legal Authority or recommended by an attorney who was. Editorial features are not advertisements.

COVER STORY · FAMILY LAW · AUSTIN

Forty Years of Returned Calls

How a family-law attorney in Austin built a practice clients recommend to their own children, one answered phone call at a time.



By the Legal Authority editors · Sample article: Eleanor Whitfield and her firm are fictional.

The phone on Eleanor Whitfield's desk rings eleven times before lunch on a typical Tuesday. She answers most of them herself. The ones she misses, she returns before she leaves. It is not a policy written down anywhere, and in forty years nobody at the firm has needed to write it down.

Family law is a practice area where clients arrive at a hard moment in their lives. Whitfield says the most useful thing she can offer them in the first week is not strategy. It is the certainty that someone will pick up.

"Clients forgive a lot. They don't forgive silence."

A practice built on referrals

Many of the firm's new matters come from former clients, and some now come from the adult children of people Whitfield represented in the 1990s. That kind of trust is what the peer-recommendation process behind this magazine is designed to surface.

The first week matters most

Whitfield keeps the first consultation deliberately unhurried. New clients get ninety minutes, not thirty, and they leave with a written list of what happens next, who will call them, and when.



It is a small thing, she says, but it changes how the whole case feels. A client who knows what is coming can make decisions calmly instead of in a panic at midnight.

Mediation first, where it fits

Whitfield also serves as a court-appointed mediator, and she brings that experience to her own cases. Where both parents are able to sit at the same table, she asks early whether mediation could settle the parenting plan before anyone files a motion. Where it is not safe or realistic, she says so plainly.

“Every family is different,” she says. “My job is to explain the options honestly and let the client choose with their eyes open.”

What colleagues notice

Marcus Bell, a Houston appellate attorney who has read many family-law records, says what stands out in Whitfield’s files is how complete they are. Every call is logged and every promise to a client has a date next to it. He calls it the least glamorous habit in the profession and one of the most valuable.

Asked what she would tell a lawyer starting out, Whitfield does not hesitate. “Return the call. Even when you have nothing new to say. Especially then.”



Eleanor Whitfield (fictional) · Whitfield Family Law · Austin, Texas · Family law and mediation.
Profile: legalauthoritymagazine.com/featured/eleanor-whitfield-sample/

Editorial feature. This article is not an advertisement and is not an endorsement by the magazine. An attorney who reuses this coverage in their own marketing must follow their state bar’s advertising rules.

PRACTICE · APPELLATE

Why Strong Appellate Briefs Say Less

Three appellate attorneys on cutting a 60-page draft to 25 without losing the argument.



Every appellate attorney knows the feeling: the record is long, the issues are real, and the first draft of the brief is twice the length anyone will read. Marcus Bell keeps a sticky note above his desk that says only “Which three?”

The question is the start of his editing process. Before he writes a word of argument, he lists every possible issue for appeal and then asks which three a busy judge needs to hear about.

Start with the standard of review

Bell says the standard of review decides more drafting choices than most lawyers admit. An issue reviewed for abuse of discretion needs a different kind of argument than one reviewed de novo, and sometimes the honest answer is that a strong-sounding point will not move the court.

“Cutting is not losing. It is choosing.”

One idea per paragraph

Desmond Trevane, an Austin appellate attorney recommended to the magazine by Bell, edits by reading only the first sentence of each paragraph. If those sentences do not tell the story of the argument on their own, the paragraph structure needs work.

Let the record speak

Both attorneys say the best citations are to the record, not to adjectives. A quoted line of testimony with a page cite does more than a paragraph explaining why the testimony matters.

The three-question edit

1. Which three issues would a busy judge need to hear about?
2. What is the standard of review for each one?
3. Can the first sentence of every paragraph tell the argument on its own?

Sample article: the attorneys quoted are fictional. Editorial feature, not an advertisement.

PRACTICE · BUSINESS LITIGATION

What Clients Ask in the First Consultation

The five questions that come up in nearly every first meeting, and how seasoned attorneys answer them.



Victor Halloran has heard the same five questions in first meetings for twenty years. He no longer waits for clients to ask them. He answers them on a single page before the meeting starts.

1. What will this cost?

Halloran gives every new business client a written budget range and explains what would move the number up or down. He says clients rarely object to the cost of litigation. They object to surprises.

2. How long will it take?

The honest answer is usually “longer than you hope”, and he says so, with the main stages laid out on a timeline.

3. Who will actually do the work?

Clients want to know whether they will speak to the attorney they met. Halloran names the team in the engagement letter.

4. What are my options besides suing?

Negotiation, mediation and a well-drafted demand letter all come up before a lawsuit does.

5. How will I hear from you?

Every client gets a standing update schedule. “It costs me an hour a month,” Halloran says, “and it saves a dozen worried phone calls.”

> **The one-page answer sheet**
> Cost range and what moves it · Timeline of the main stages · Who on the team does the work · Options besides a lawsuit · When the client will hear from the firm

Sample article: the attorneys quoted are fictional. Editorial feature, not an advertisement.

THE PEER RULE

How Attorneys Are Chosen



Attorneys appear in Legal Authority in one of two ways. The editors invite an attorney to be interviewed for a feature, or an attorney already published in the magazine recommends a colleague.

Only published attorneys may recommend someone, and every profile shows who recommended that attorney, so readers can follow the chain of trust.

A place in the magazine cannot be bought. Features describe how an attorney works, not the outcome of any case, and nothing in the magazine is a promise of a result.

A featured attorney receives an interview article published in full on the web, a profile page and directory listing, this issue as a print-quality PDF, and an “As Featured In” badge.

We Don’t List Attorneys, We Recognize Them

Read every story in full, find a recommended attorney, or recommend a colleague at

legalauthoritymagazine.com

About this edition. This is a sample edition made to preview the magazine’s design. The attorneys, firms and stories in it are fictional. Issue 01 will feature real attorneys.