



IS THERE AN ELEPHANT IN YOUR LAW OFFICE?

By Eleanor Southers, JD

You've probably heard about the dysfunctional family with the Elephant in the living room, and nobody talking about it or even recognizes that it is there. Well, the same thing can and does happen frequently in Law Offices, from the small to the large.

So what are the characteristics of these Law Office Elephants?

- Elephants are born from denial and fed by denial
- Elephants are big, heavy and move very slowly. They are very happy to stay in the office all the time and never go outside.
- Elephants start out as 1,000 lb babies and get bigger ...and bigger.
- Elephants take up a lot of room and are constantly getting in the way.
- Elephants eat and poop and you have to feed them and clean up after them.
- Elephants can't fit through your doors once they are full grown, so you usually have to take the door off the hinges or cut a huge hole in the wall to get them out.

How are Elephants created?

- Elephants are created by time wasters.
- Elephants are created by living in denial about issues in the office which cause resentment, foster chaos, and divert the focus of good lawyering.
- Elephants are created by lack of leadership.
- Elephants are created by lethargy.
- Elephants are sometimes created by drug or alcohol use.
- Elephants are created by lack of planning.

Time Wasters can come as spending inordinate amount of time on unimportant phone calls or projects which will not produce revenue. More subtle time wasters are being so hesitate to make a decision that one never gets made or when it does, it is useless.

How about the "doggie" cases in the office that do not produce anything but pain and frustration? Definitely a huge Time Waster.

Then there is the law office where one of the staff comes in late every morning and every one grumbles about it behind his/her back but no one ever speaks up. Or the drama queen or king of the office who has an emergency every twenty minutes. Or the Bank that totally screws up the accounts over and over again, but never gets dumped. Or the

client who, although his case is worth big bucks, is such a hassle that it takes 24 hours of therapy to recover from a session with him.

Elephants don't like someone to take a leadership role in the office and to begin to solve the problems and thus deny the elephant more food so it can get bigger. Elephants would prefer their handlers to snooze or zone out for most of the day.

When Elephants smell that someone in the law office is using drugs or alcohol, they raise their trunks up and thank the elephant Gods for providing a substantial increase in food. Especially, if there are timid people around who cannot bring themselves to recognize that something is very, very wrong in the work environment. In these cases a special Elephant Intervention might have to take place using professional help. More tragically, if lethargy and lack of leadership is already in place, the Elephant can get so big that it obliterates the office and everyone in it.

Elephants thrive best in an environment where there is no planning. When there are not clear goals and focus, Elephants are happy. Once a plan is in place to stop time wasters and to challenge problems and not ignore them, Elephants start to shrink to a size that will fit through the office doors and with a kick to the behind, wander back out to the jungle where they belong.

There are other times, however, when people in the office have to cut a huge hole in the wall and shove the Elephant out. Unfortunately, the Elephant may be accompanied by several staff members or clients. The results can be painful, but remember the hole in the wall can be easily rebuilt and after sweeping up the last of the Elephant pooh, the office will be large enough to accommodate all kinds of new work and profits.

So the next time you reach for a pen on your desk but instead find a big grey trunk under your hand, it's time to act.....

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