DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL, IT'S ALL IN THE FORM

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As a new attorney, especially those in small or solo offices, it quickly becomes apparent that law school might not have prepared you for everything that is going to come through your office door. The first time you are asked to draft a complaint, a motion for summary judgment, or even a power of attorney document, panic might slowly slip in to your mind. Have no fear though, there are tools available that can erase that panic and replace it with confidence. Confidence, that not only can you get that document drafted this time, but next time, and even the time after that. It's all in the "form."

When I teach students in my Advanced Legal Research class about formbooks, I usually get some skeptical looks. Questions arise like; "Isn't that cheating?" The answer is a resounding NO! Since the start of time (perhaps a slight exaggeration) there have been formbooks. In the practice of law time is money, thus publishers were quick to catch on to the fact that there is a large market out there for ready-to-use formbooks that can be used to cut down on the amount of time it takes to draft legal documents.

If you can find a form that covers, or closely covers, the document you are trying to draft then you are not only saving yourself time and money, but you are also borrowing the expertise of lawyers who have done this type of work before you. Formbooks are written by lawyers and editors (often one and the same) who have either drafted these documents in the past or have culled these documents from existing contracts, pleadings, and forms.

One note of caution should be mentioned for those using formbooks. The forms provided in a given formbook are intended as examples. You should always modify the forms so that they match the facts and legal requirements of your particular client's situation.

Over the next few columns I will review the myriad of sources available to those who do not wish to reinvent the wheel each time they must prepare a legal document. The Chase Law Library collects many of these resources, so please feel free to drop by and use them. Remember it's not cheating to use these forms, it's just plain smart!
The legal world, as reflected through formbooks, is broken up into two distinct areas: transactional practice and trial practice. We will begin this column by focusing on some of the general purpose transactional formbooks.

**General Form Books**

There is one particular formbook set that no lawyer should be without. It is *The Essential Formbook: Comprehensive Management Tools for Lawyers* published by the Law Practice Management Section of the ABA. This four volume looseleaf set gathers into one, easy-to-use resource the essential forms that law practitioners use on a regular basis. It includes Partnership Agreements and Organizational Agreements; Client Intake and Fee Agreements; Fees, Billing, and Collection; Calendar, Docket, and File Management; as well as Law Firm Financial Management.

For general legal forms there are three multi-volume sets that are the standard in the legal market. I will treat these three as a whole. They are:


Each of these titles does a wonderful job of providing extensive forms (with commentary and analysis), in the drafting of any legal document. Within the pages of these titles you will find forms dealing with subjects as diverse as:

- Agency Agreements
- Sales Agency Agreement
- Exclusive Territory
- Bypass Trust Will for Married Persons with Children
- Sale of Single Owner LLC Membership Interests
- General Agreement
- Zoning Ordinance
- Funeral Establishment

Next column I will focus in on formbooks that deal with specific transactional areas and look at formbooks that cover Kentucky and Ohio law in particular.