

FEATURING

Mark Chinn

Your Best Work Is Hiding Behind a Hundred Small Decisions

Most business owners I meet are technically brilliant. They know their craft. They've built something real. But when I ask them what they actually do all day, the answer is rarely the work they started the business to do.

It's approvals. Edits. Questions that should have been answered by a system. Decisions that should have been made by a process.

Mark Chinn has been practicing family law in Mississippi since 1988. He started with a PO box and zero clients. Today he runs a statewide practice and was just awarded the 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Mississippi Bar Association. But the thing that strikes me most about his story is not the awards. It's how clearly he saw, from the very beginning, that running a law practice required three separate skill sets: technician, manager, and client relations specialist.

Most people never make that distinction. They think being great at the work means they'll be great at the business. Mark knew better. "I've always been by nature, marketing and management driven in addition to law practice driven," he told me. That mindset shaped forty years of decisions, including the ones that positioned him to adopt AI tools faster and more effectively than almost anyone in his field.

Twenty years ago, his workflow looked like this: drive to the post office, retrieve mail from a PO box, return to the office, open each letter, pull the corresponding paper file from the file room, flip through the correspondence section, dictate a response into a dictaphone, hand the tape to his secretary, wait for her to type it, proofread it, sign it, envelope it, and mail it. The whole loop took twenty to thirty minutes per file. On a good day, he could handle eight to twelve files during billable hours.

Today, the same work takes minutes or seconds. Email replaced the PO box. A case management system replaced the file room. Document assembly replaced dictation. And now, AI agents handle the first draft of motions, discovery responses, and cross-examination outlines.

But here's the part most people miss: the technology didn't make him better at law. It freed him to do what he was always best at. "AI will help me make sure that I'm always delivering that product that maybe I

worked on so hard before. And it will make sure I don't leave something out. It'll make sure it's perfect," he said. The courtroom work, the client strategy, the judgment calls? Those are still his. The tedious assembly work that used to eat his day? That's been systematized.

This is not a story about robots replacing lawyers. It's a story about a business owner who understood early that his time had different values depending on the task. And he spent forty years building systems to protect the high-value hours.

The turning point for how he thought about client experience came twenty-five years ago in a hospital bed. Mark had just had hip replacement surgery. He was exhausted, in pain, and woken up every hour for vitals. One morning, there was no coffee at eight o'clock. He lost his composure and threw the coffee pot across the room. A little while later, his surgeon walked in holding a cup of coffee and a wry smile. That moment, care in the middle of chaos, became the template for how he built his practice. "We try to treat people like they're coming out of surgery and they're in pain. And we understand that we want to try and make it better for them."

Most lawyers think the work is the brief or the argument. Mark understood the work is also the experience. He read *The Experience Economy*. He studied luxury spas. He asked what made service feel great, not just competent. "A great business doesn't just deliver a service, they deliver an experience," he said. Then he built that into every client interaction, from the first phone call to the final paperwork.

That's the quiet shift most people never make. They keep doing the work the same way and wonder why clients don't refer them or why growth feels so hard. The business is not just what you deliver. It's how it feels to receive it. And you cannot scale that feeling without process.

Mark also saw the marketing shift coming before most of his peers. Twenty years ago, sixty percent of his cases came from other lawyers. Twenty percent from past clients. Ten percent from random referrals. Business cards and handshakes at the country club mattered. Today, ninety percent of his business comes from SEO searches for divorce lawyers in Jackson, Mississippi. And now the ground is shifting again. Clients are consulting ChatGPT before they ever pick up the phone.

"Anybody who thinks they're going to try and stop this is nuts," he said. He's not threatened by it. He's leaning into it. He's built AI agents that analyze documents, generate cross-examinations, and handle routine drafting. He talks to them like colleagues. He feeds them his books, his logic, his past work so they learn to replicate his judgment. Then he reviews their output and makes the final call.

That's the difference between resistance and leverage. A lot of business owners see new tools as a threat to what made them successful. Mark saw them as a way to do more of what he was already great at.

The lesson here is not about AI. It's about this: if you are still making every decision, reviewing every document, answering every question, then you are the bottleneck. Your expertise is valuable. But if it only exists in your head, your business cannot grow past your personal capacity.

Process is what lets you replicate your judgment without being in the room. Systems are what let other people or other tools make the decision you would have made. And that is not a loss of control. It's the only way to scale what you're great at.

I see this pattern constantly. The best operators are not the ones doing all the work. They are the ones who built the machine that does the work the right way, every time, without them. They've documented the logic. They've trained the team or the system. They've freed themselves to do the work only they can do.

If you are technically brilliant but operationally buried, you have a process problem, not a talent problem. The fix is not working harder. It's building systems that protect your time for the work that actually matters.

If this sounds like your business, let's talk. Stonefly Consulting helps founders systematize operations so they can grow without burning out. Book a free consultation at stoneflyconsulting.com.

Adapted from Mark Chinn's appearance on the Process Over Pressure podcast:

<https://processoverpressure.com/episodes/the-40-year-evolution-from-a-po-box-to-ai-driven-law-mark-chinn>



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