

Managing Your Time Wisely

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The U.S. ranks 7th in the world in the amount of hour's citizens spend at work each year. With that number increasing, it's sufficed to say that our time away from work is more valuable than ever. And as lawyers, we definitely aren't immune to long hours in the office with little time to enjoy on the golf course.

If you've ever thought to yourself that there aren't enough hours in the day, you may want to consider some very simple time-management routines that will increase the efficiency of your time at work. By following some very simple guidelines, you can work more efficiently, and free up more time away from the office. Who couldn't use that?

Log Your Time

The first thing you have to do is find out exactly where your time is going. For 2 or 3 days, keep a log of the time spent on everything you do at work. This includes breaks, checking email, unexpected meetings, etc.

Breakdown your log into categories such as phone calls, appointments, meetings, travel, meals, administrative work, etc. Identify your patterns of time usage and ask yourself, "Does this usage of time match my key responsibilities?"

If not, you may want to delegate some of those tasks to other staff members that have those responsibilities. At the least, you will identify tasks that consume more time than they should. You can then use this information to focus on efficiently eliminating wasted time.

Use Goals to Manage Your Time

Set daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly goals and estimate the time needed to accomplish them. Then, allocate the time-- set up a schedule -- and stick to it!

If you decide to spend one hour per day to achieve a goal two months down the road, JUST DO IT! Spend that one hour per day productively while staying within the allocated time.

Also, be sure to leave a time cushion for unexpected events. If you don't, you will almost certainly fall behind schedule.



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Avoid Time Theft

There are so many little things that can quickly add up and steal your time. This will usually lead to the inevitable question, “Where did my time go?”

1. Not being able to say NO
2. Taking on duties that we’re someone else’s
3. Avoidable chat with co-workers
4. Telephone calls
5. Voice Mail
6. Emails
7. Avoidable travel

Think of ways to minimize your time spent doing these time-consuming activities.

Get organized with a Case Management System!

I use a case management program called Needles to help manage my time, track the status of my cases, and give me reminders-- among plenty of other things. It’s amazing what this program can do. If you haven’t heard of Needles, go to their website (www.needleslaw.com) and download the free demo.

This is a pricey program, but it is definitely worth the cost. Once you start using it, your firm will run more efficiently than ever. And, efficiency equals saved money and time!

Schedule Time for Email and Voicemail

Set aside 3 separate times throughout the day to check your mail-- morning, afternoon, and before you go home. Try your best to stick with this schedule. I know that some people will go through the withdrawals of not knowing what’s in their inbox every moment of the day—BUT DON’T GIVE IN!

Checking your email constantly will eat away at your time like you wouldn’t believe.

Return Phone Calls at a Set Time

Set aside an hour in the middle of your day to return phone calls. This allows you to stay on task when you’re in the middle of something, instead of losing focus and talking on the phone. There will definitely be some instances where you have to make a call outside of your allotted time, but do your best to make all of the planned calls inside the scheduled timeframe.

Prioritize Your To Do List



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Don't just list everything you have to do on a sheet of paper and call that your "To Do List". Come up with a system of prioritizing the things on your list.

I will usually put an "A", "B", or "C" next to each item. "A's" are the highest priorities and "C's" are the lowest.

Don't Spend All Day in Staff Meetings

Make your staff meetings short and to the point. If you have a 2 hour meeting every two weeks, try to break that up into a 30 minute meeting twice a week. This will keep your staff and the meetings more productive.

There will be no need to "crowbar" everything into one meeting when you're able to address issues at another meeting in the next few days. New issues will also be able to get addressed in a timelier manner.

Do Your Most Dreaded Task First

Stop spending all day thinking about the task you have to do-- but hate doing. When you do this task first, it frees your mind from having to think about it all day and gives you a great start to the day.

Plan Tomorrow Before You Go Home

At the end of your day, after you've checked your email and made your final phone calls, plan for tomorrow. This will enable you to get to the office and get to work immediately the next day.

The saying that "breakfast is the most important meal of the day" holds true when planning for the next day. The same way skipping breakfast can make you sluggish for the entire day, getting to the office and having a slow start can affect your day's performance too.

If you get to the office and have to spend twenty or thirty minutes planning out your day, you're already off to a slow start. There's also a chance that you forgot some things from the day before. This leads to a less productive day.

START TODAY!

Get control of your time and life today! Come up with a plan that utilizes these guidelines and STICK TO IT! When you use your time at work efficiently, you'll find that you have more time to spend on growing your practice and enjoying life outside of the office.

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