

Tackle the Time Crunch

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20 Useful Time Management Tips for Lawyers

Day by day. Hour by hour. Minute by minute.

Billing time slips away!

By day's end, you are exhausted, but you haven't met your billing goals for the day. At this point, stress skyrockets - and sometimes, panic sets in.

TACKLE THE TIME DRAIN!

Lawyers can begin managing their time by **better managing themselves**.

Here are 20 useful time management tips that will help YOU make **maximum use of every hour** in your day.

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1. Time diagnosis

Find out where your time goes. Take my [time management test](#), or record how you spend your time from the moment you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night. Do this in thirty minute increments on a daily basis for 2-3 weeks at least twice a year.

2. Prune time wasters

Identify the time wasting activities, the unproductive demands on your time, and **prune them out of your work day**.

Things like too many meetings, phone chatter, long lunches, forwarded funny emails, repeatedly checking your inbox, answering every phone call on your cell. Each time new trivia begins nibbling at your time, prune relentlessly!

3. Consolidate discretionary time

Determine how much time do you have left each week for the big tasks that will make a contribution to the success of your job.

When possible, consolidate that discretionary time into continuous chunks of **90 minute blocks, three days a week**. Work consistently during those blocks without interruption except for emergencies.

And.....**CLOSE YOUR DOOR DURING FOCUS TIMES!**

4. SWAT Teams

Your day is mapped out. Then a catastrophe occurs! Sick child, absent babysitter, broken water pipes, whatever!

You have no back-up plan.

You need a SWAT Team, your personal group of **special backup people** who fill in at home or work when you have a real emergency.

Identify people you know and respect, at least two in each category: daytime crises, nighttime crises, weekends, and when you are out of town. Your agreement with them is this: You are on call for crises only!

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The pay? Reciprocation, reward or good ol' green stuff! If you try hard enough, you can find SWAT team members to substitute for you at work as well as at home.

5. The rule of two

Stop to think and plan.

Do a **ten minute planning session** prior to each day, either the day before or early in the morning. **Identify the top two items for the coming day.** What is the best way to go about achieving your goals?

Choose the two items that, if you had no time to do anything else, you would feel as though you had accomplished something. Do those two things first thing in the morning before you check your email or return phone calls.

6. Get set for tomorrow

Clear your desk before leaving your office each day. Then place in the middle of your desk whatever you must deal with first tomorrow.

By placing your priority task in the middle of your desk, you avoid mind interference, and you get down to work when you enter the office.

7. Focus day without phones

It can be done!

Try planning for one focus day a week to get important work accomplished **without using your phone** as usual.

That does not mean you cannot use your phone at all!

What it does mean is that during this focus day the only time you are on the phone is if you initiate the call because it pertains directly to what you are doing.

Come up for air to check your voice mails and emails twice a day. Return only those that are urgent.

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8. Cluster calling

You don't have to be on 24 hour call as long as you **return your calls within 24 hours**.

Optimize your time by returning as many calls as you can at one time, preferably at an hour when people are most likely to keep conversations short, like right before lunch and shortly before five.

9. Phone tag

Start leaving your **email address as well as your phone number** at the end of your recorded voice messages so that your caller can choose to get in touch with you via email - which saves you both time and prevents phone tag.

10. Prioritizing

Look at your month at a glance calendar daily and **rearrange appointments** if necessary to get your top priority tasks completed. Then guesstimate the time you need to complete them and add thirty minutes.

This additional time allows you to complete your tasks without rushing and gives you downtime before starting a new project.

11. Key to high productivity

Become intensely **results-oriented!**

Dedicate yourself to getting better and better at the few tasks that account for most of your results. Delegate, outsource or eliminate all those things that contribute very little to your results.

12. Cell phone mania and email obsession

Turn your **cell phone off** until you are ready to make outbound calls.

Check your voice mails only four times a day.

Keep the cell phone off when you are driving.

Turn the **email bell off** on our computer.

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When you get to work, wait until after you get your priority work done before checking emails. Do your planned work first.

Designate limited, specific times throughout the day to check email.

Reward yourself for self-discipline with personal treats.

13. Red circling

Circle in red or spot your PDA with the dates of deadlines, court appearances, speeches, vacations and other major events.

By distinguishing these dates clearly, you can keep from overloading yourself the day before and after.

14. Feel free to reschedule

Most people will not get upset with you if you need to reschedule an appointment.

People do get upset, however, when you do not call ahead to reschedule or you cancel at the last minute.

Semantics is almost as important as courtesy here. The word “cancel” sounds inconsiderate; the word “**reschedule**” denotes professionalism.

15. Home sweet home

Work one day a week at home or schedule an early morning work period at home without telephone before going to work so that you can accomplish high quality, results-oriented tasks.

16. Set aside an hour a day for you

Time crunch is killing us physically and emotionally.

You can find **one hour a day for yourself**...to do what you want to do. Think about just sitting down and *thinking*. Figure out what time each day at the same hour you can block out for yourself.

Establish this habit and reap the reward of health and sanity!

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17. Guard personal time

Let other people know that the time you have set aside as “**my time**” is very special to you and that you would appreciate not being interrupted during a specific time period.

When another person violates “my time,” state assertively (but politely!) that only occasional brief interruptions qualify as okay.

18. White space

Schedule white space on your calendar **at least two hours a week**, either during week days or weekends. That means you leave two consecutive hours empty with nothing planned in advance.

When the day comes, you decide then how you are going to spend that time doing something fun with no “should’s” involved.

19. Discover the productivity of waiting time

Learning to use the valuable time spent waiting is essential to effective time management.

What keeps us from making use of waiting time is often the lack of critical tools or products. Start using your car as an office and kitchen on wheels by organizing the trunk of your car so you always have what you need. Divide your car trunk in half. In one half, store work- related equipment, such as expanding file folders with stationary, thank you notes, etc.. In the other half, pack family-related necessities such as athletic gear, carton drinks, granola bars, and extra outfits for the kids. The division helps keep the trunk organized and neat.

20. Integrate multiple activities

Spend quality time in several areas of your life on the same day by **integrating or combining your activities** at one time.

This is not multi-tasking! Talking on your cell phone while your land line is ringing and you are checking email while listening to a podcast is multi-tasking.

Lifting weights while watching CNN or reading the Bar Journal on the treadmill is **integrating!** You kill two birds with one stone but one of those birds is not stressed-out you!

Time management is more than just managing our time, it's **managing ourselves in relation to time.**

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It is setting priorities, taking charge of the situation, and changing those habits that cause us to waste time.

Time is our most valuable commodity - **get control of your time, and you'll meet those billing goals day after day!**

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