



Allison C. Shields Legal Ease Consulting, Inc.
Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com

Preventing “Lawyer Meltdown” and Creating Productive, Profitable and Enjoyable Law Practices



Less is More

By Allison C. Shields, Esq.

I’ve been thinking about January. It’s the first month of the year, and most of us are making resolutions. A common one we hear often is to get rid of the clutter. Most of us are inundated with paperwork, email, and lists of things to do on a daily basis. We’ve got more demands on our time than we could ever live up to. In this first month of 2012, I am reminded that it is often better (and more productive) to get along with less.

Last year, I attended the American Heart Association’s “Go Red for Women” luncheon on Long Island. It is an incredibly well-attended event, with over 800 attendees. Gail Blanke, an author and life coach, was the keynote speaker. One of the things she talked about was letting go. She described an exercise she gives her clients to do, and I’m going to challenge all of my readers to do it. What is the exercise?

Get rid of 50 things.

That's it. Find 50 things that you can toss, and get rid of them. You would be surprised at how much better you feel and how much more productive you become when you get rid of some of the stuff that is weighing you down.

If you need some ideas about what to get rid of, here are a few suggestions:

Your worst clients. 20% of your clients give you 80% of your headaches. Do you have a client (or clients) who always second-guesses your advice, talks down to you or your staff, never provides documents you request, fails to show up for appointments and is constantly fighting you over your fees? They're killing your motivation, taking your focus away from your good clients and distracting you from getting other productive work done. Even if they are paying you, you're losing in the long run. Make a motion to withdraw if you have to, but get rid of them! Resolve to avoid these kinds of clients in the future.

Meetings. Sometimes meetings are helpful, or even necessary. Face to face interaction can go a long way toward developing relationships. But meetings can be abused and they can become a colossal waste of time. Before you schedule a meeting, stop and think about whether the same objective could be accomplished in a faster, more efficient way. (For more on critical thinking about meetings, take a look at my post, [Is This Meeting Really Necessary?](#))

Commitments that no longer serve you. If you've found yourself over-committed and burned out, re-prioritize your activities and get rid of some. Learn to say no. If that activity isn't enjoyable or it isn't making a big impact on your practice or career in terms of making connections, boosting your reputation, expanding your reach or providing potential business opportunities, it might be time to move on.

Paperwork. Lawyers are all about belts and suspenders. But with technology today, there is no reason to keep duplicates. There may be no reason to have a hard copy at all. If it is information you can easily obtain online, or if it is already stored electronically (and backed up), ditch the paper. Most of the paper we keep never gets looked at anyway.

Old periodicals. Sure, there might be a great article in that trade magazine from October 2010, but chances are you'll never find the time to read it if you haven't already. And another issue is probably sitting in your mailbox right now. The fact is that most periodicals recycle the same content over and over again. If you haven't read this month's article on cloud computing, there will surely be another one coming up in a future issue – and by the time you read the old article, the information may be outdated anyway. This is especially true when your reading involves technology, the marketplace or the law, all of which are constantly changing.

Tasks that can be delegated. You've got too many things on your 'to do' list. I know you do. Many (if not most) of them shouldn't be there at all – either they don't need to be done because they don't relate to your highest priorities or they can be done by someone else. Your to do list should only include tasks that require your expertise or your personal touch, tasks that relate to your long term goals or have a big impact on your practice, your career or your life.

Email. Email can be a very effective communication tool, but it isn't suitable for all purposes and it is easy to become overwhelmed. If your email box is overflowing, get rid of some of the junk email. Unsubscribe from lists you never subscribed to in the first place (all of those 'networkers' who got hold of your business card and subscribed you to their promotional email newsletter), and from lists that you thought would be useful but you never get around to reading. Ask friends, family and colleagues to stop sending you joke or 'chain letter' emails.

Old electronic files. Sometimes it pays to get rid of your virtual clutter, too. While you may not be able to ditch legal files, you can move them off of your hard drive or server to remote storage to free up space. And you probably have electronic files on your computer that are not legal files, and that you no longer need – take a quick look through your electronic directory and see what you can delete.

Miscellaneous 'stuff'. If your desk drawers are so crammed that you can't find a pen (with ink) when you need it, pull them out and start tossing. Old rubber bands? Bent paper clips? Candy that's been sitting in your drawer so long you can't remember

when you put it there? Flyers for CLE programs that have already taken place? They're all candidates for the circular file.

Less is more. So here's the challenge to all of you – get rid of 50 things – and feel free to email me at Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com and tell me what you tossed!

About the Author

Allison C. Shields, Esq., President of Legal Ease Consulting, Inc., is a former practicing attorney and law firm manager who helps law firms create more productive, profitable and enjoyable law practices by providing practice management and business development coaching and consulting. Contact her at Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com, visit her website at www.LawyerMeltdown.com or her blog, www.LegalEaseConsulting.com.

