Quick Tips to Help Your Law Office Run More Smoothly

A guest blog post by Beverly Michaelis:

What's the best way to get your point across? Some would say, "quickly!" So in that spirit, here are a few quick tips to help your law office run more smoothly.

Productivity

- Once you've read or responded to e-mail, save it to the client's electronic folder. Don't let it pile up in your inbox. Remember – the best approach for all e-mail is to apply the "4 Ds:" Do, Defer, Delegate, or Delete.
- Be equally austere with your paperwork. Practice OHIO (Only Handle It Once). Act, file, delegate, or trash.
- Protect your productivity. A ten minute telephone call can easily translate to 45 minutes of follow-up: documenting the file, sending an e-mail, and posting a time entry. Once you've dealt with the interruption, more time is lost regaining your concentration. Minimize phone interruptions by blocking out time each day to make and receive calls.
- Use this same technique with projects by making an appointment with yourself on the calendar. When the appointment arrives, respect it. If you give your time away because "something came up," you are cheating yourself and the client.

Calendar Management

- I will never forget the lawyer who missed a statute of limitations because he didn't check his calendar before he left on vacation. Always protect important dates with *multiple* reminders leading up to the ultimate deadline. Most practice management programs allow you to do this quite easily.
- Some matters can go months with no calendar activity. This can lead to neglect. Protect all files with a recurring 30 day reminder. When the reminder comes up, pull and review the file.
- Take it to the next level. If you have invested in practice management software, learn how to use key features. For example, most programs support chaining together related deadlines and events. In the old days, we called this a checklist. Imagine how nice it would be if each time you opened a new matter, your calendar was automatically populated with all necessary dates and events?

Client Relations

- Client relations can go south quickly if we fail to appreciate what clients really want from us. (And it's *not* a well-researched brief – most can't tell the difference.) Remember, all clients have four basic needs: the need to be understood, feel welcomed, feel important, and the need for privacy.
- Once you've met the needs of your clients, remember to TREAT them well. Be timely in your work. Respond to phone calls, e-mails, and other requests promptly. Be empathetic (remember the four needs of all clients?) Assure and reassure your clients. Lastly, deliver quality "tangibles" by producing error-free work product.
- Finally, don't forget staff. They often have more client contact than you. Provide them with business cards, introduce them to clients, and explain their role. These small gestures will inspire client confidence and improve client-staff communication.

Beverly Michaelis is a Practice Management Advisor for the Oregon State Bar Professional Liability Fund. Visit her **blog** for more helpful information and to follow her on Twitter and connect on LinkedIn.

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