

DE-LAP Zone

A Message from the Delaware Lawyers Assistance Program

A Realistic Plan for Managing Your Time

By Carol P. Waldhauser, Executive Director

As Jim slammed down the receiver, he mumbled to his associate: "There is just not enough time in the day to finish everything. I feel that I have not gotten anything done again today. In fact, I need to call and cancel my plans for this evening." Jim's associate replied: "You know Jim, good time management depends on (a) being realistic about what you know you must do within a certain time period, (b) knowing what you want to do, and (c) organizing your life to achieve a balance between the two."

At first, Jim was ready to respond with a classic zinger, but then he stopped and thought: "What if she is right?" Rarely has Jim seen her never having enough time to do the things she wants to do. Similarly, rarely has Jim heard of an attorney who complained that he or she had too much time on their hands. Jim thought: "There must be a realistic plan for managing my time."

Generally for lawyers, time pressures are a major issue. Additionally, individuals are unrealistic about time. Dr. Jane Burka, Ph.D., a Berkeley, California Psychologist states that individuals either overestimate how long something will take or they underestimate. She suggests, "the first thing to do is anticipate realistically how long a task will take and how much time you can spend on it. For instance, if a project is due in a week and you're feeling optimistic about that deadline, check your calendar. Are your in-laws coming to visit on one of those days? Do you have an all-day meeting another day?"

Dr. Ronald Drabman, Ph.D., professor and director of clinical psychology at the University of Mississippi Medical Center suggests, "You have to take steps now to ensure that you'll complete what you have

to do. For instance, tell your assistant today that you have to be uninterrupted tomorrow while you work on your project. Working without interruption would be difficult to do when it's already tomorrow and your phone is ringing all day." If you've set aside the time to work, you should also have a clear sense of your priorities, suggests Dr. Drabman. You have to consider all the tasks you have to do, then put them in order of importance. And chances are, if you don't get to some of the lower priorities on your list, they weren't very important—or they were things you couldn't possibly have done, given your timetable. *Take Control of Your Life, A Complete Guide To Stress Relief, Faelten & Diamond, p. 20.*

Also, analyze how you use your time. Make a simple daily log. This log is not for billing purposes; but for you and what you do throughout the day. Then, look back and analyze your daily logs for problems related to how you spend your time. It may reveal time wasters of which you might not be aware. It might also reveal other problems, like having too much on your plate or not having the right tools or resources.

Once you have learned to block out time and have analyzed your time, learn to take baby steps. In other words, big projects can be intimidating. Instead of becoming stuck or overwhelmed by the enormity of the task ahead of you, divide the project into smaller, achievable steps—baby steps—one step at a time. Yes, even lawyers can take baby steps!

Other sound tips for managing your time include, but are not limited to, the following. According to Trevor Powell in *The Keys To Good Time Management* you should:

1. Know Your Goals In Life:

Identify the activities you value most

and your main goals at work and at home. These goals are the map you need to direct your life and schedule your time. Break down your main goals into smaller, more manageable tasks.

2. Rank Priorities:

Ask yourself how important a particular task is to you. Activities can be ranked according to their importance. Try identifying the activities that produce the greatest reward. Give these activities priority over others.

3. Write Down Your Plans:

A written plan enables you to take a more detached view of your commitments. Keep a diary of important dates and tasks to be done. A daily "to do" list can give direction and a sense of achievement once tasks have been accomplished.

4. Delegate Tasks:

Trying to do everything yourself is often a major cause of stress. Take a look at your schedule and work out what you can hand to somebody else to do. You can still monitor other people's progress and maintain a level of control.

5. Work Out A System:

Disorganization makes work and wastes time. Organize your environment so that everything has its place. Keep a note pad and calendar by the phone and set up a filing system for bills. Establish a daily routine.

6. Do It Now – Not Later:

By putting off today's tasks until tomorrow you are simply storing up work for yourself. Ask yourself, "Why am I putting it off?" Set realistic deadlines for each day and then do your best to keep to them.

7. Allow Slack In Timetable:

Never overfill your timetable. Always allow some slack. Then, if there is an emergency, you can accommodate it. If you know your time is not stretched to the limit you will feel less stressed. Plan time for rest and relaxation.

8. Learn to Say No:

If you cannot say no to the demands of others, you will end up being a servant to their priorities, never able to say or do what you want. Stay in control of your own time, and say no to time wasting and unnecessary activities.

9. One Thing At A Time:

You may have many things to do, but you cannot do them all at once, especially since important tasks usually require energy and concentration. You will find it less stressful if you can finish one task before starting another.

10. Know Your Prime Time:

Identify when you work best and plan that time for your most important or demanding tasks. For most people this is early in the morning. Allocate undemand-

ing tasks to times when your energy may be low.

11. You're Not Perfect:

If you are a perfectionist, you may become bogged down in detail and find it difficult to vary your speed according to priorities. Learn to assess the situation in advance, so you can work within set time limits.

12. Keep a Balance:

Planning time for work, rest, and play will help maintain your health and enthusiasm and allow you to keep a balanced perspective. Break your routine and plan time to relax during the day. Take regular vacations. *The Keys To Good Time Management, Trevor Powell, Free Yourself from Harmful Stress, Life Skills, p. 95.*

As for Jim, he admits that there are still days that his time management and balance go right out the window either because of a pleading, new client, and/or a family emergency. Fortunately, however, things are getting better for him. Today, Jim is a man with a purpose. Through time and personal management, Jim is finding a balance in

life—Serenity. He has even found time to thank his associate for helping him implement a realistic plan for time management.

For more information regarding this topic or if you, or someone you know, is having difficulty that is affecting his or her professionalism or quality of life, call or contact The Delaware Lawyers Assistance Program (DE-LAP) on our confidential line at (302) 777-0124 or toll-free 1-877-24delap or e-mail cwaldhauser@de-lap.org. ☎

Psychology in Negotiation for the Attorney

Thursday, September 11, 2008

3.0 hours CLE credit

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