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TIME MASTERY

By Tanyee Cheung

ONE OF THE MOST powerful life skills is time mastery. For lawyers, developing and honing this skill can help us improve both our business and personal relationships, our productivity, and our well-being. For law firms, recognizing the importance of developing these skills in our attorneys and fostering well-being in our community is not only a noble goal but our duty to our profession.

Time Management Matrix Quadrants

Important and Immediate

QUADRANT 1

Deadlines
Crisis
Key Meetings

Manage
and
Do

Not Important and Immediate

QUADRANT 2

Emails
Phone Calls
Other Meetings

Minimize
and
Delegate

Important and Not Immediate

QUADRANT 3

Life Planning
Relationships
Health

Plan
and Do

Not Important or Immediate

QUADRANT 4

Busy Work
Escape
Time Wasters
Work that can be outsourced

Eliminate



WORKING FROM HOME (WFH) TIPS:

HOW TO KEEP YOUR WORK AND HOME LIFE SEPARATE

- Family affair—Get everyone on the same page!
- Work Life—Get everyone on the same page!
- Separate your work and home spaces—even setting aside a corner in the bedroom will help
- Separate your work and home time—time block and stick to it!
- If you can, use earbuds with soothing sounds
- Use meeting times wisely—consider micro meetings to check in
- Well-being is critical (Quadrant 3)—*plan for it!*



FAMILY AFFAIR:

MAKE SURE THE FAMILY IS ON THE SAME PAGE!

- Be realistic in your evaluation of the situation
- Decision fixing—Pre-arrange meals and set a family schedule at the beginning of the week
- Separate home and workspace
Even if you share workspace, ensure everyone is working in the “workspace” and that a separate area is designated for play, conversations, watching TV, etc.
- Separate home and work tasks
- Keep regular office hours – When you leave “the office,” shut down your computer and respond as you would if you weren’t working from home
- Take breaks (can be used for kid time, meal prep, exercise, or meditation time!)

The COVID-19 pandemic added a few extra balls to the juggling act that attorneys have been practicing well before work and non-work life began to meld into one another. As some of us slowly became one with our computer, rocking babies with a foot on their car seat as we zoomed away on calls, we started to lose our balance without even realizing it. Our new normal became, well, normal. We became “masters” of multi-tasking. Not only could we have it all, we could have it all at once! Unfortunately, studies show that multi-tasking in reality is task-switching, moving between tasks as opposed to doing multiple tasks at the same time. Researchers at the University of Michigan found that participants lost time when they multi-tasked. Moreover, the time lost increased with the complexity and the unfamiliarity of the tasks.

Think of your brain like open tabs on the computer screen—the more tabs you have open, the slower your computer goes, the more you multi-task, the slower your brain is working. So, if multi-tasking/task switching isn’t the answer, what is? After reading hundreds of articles on productivity, I found that there were a few fundamental time mastery skills: To Do Lists, Time Blocking, Decision Fixing, Saying No, and Thoughtful End to the Day.

To Do Lists

Many of us have probably had to-do lists but often the list is done with items off the top of our head. We don’t actually think about how we organize our lists. The lists themselves becomes unmanageable with us needing to add “organize to-do-list” to our to-do-list! There are a number of ways to create effective and productive lists. The top one is the Eisenhower Matrix.

This method requires us to consciously bucket our activities. Quad 1 is what you expect it to be. These are the tasks you have with specific upcoming deadlines, “fires” that arise during the day, and key meetings.

Quad 2 are things we treat/think are “important” because, well, we don’t really think about it. So, we will pick up phones, chat with someone who walks in our office, respond to emails that interrupt our flow, taking care of that “one small ask,”—all of which gets in the way of getting Quad 1 tasks done effectively. Quad 2 items are in our face leading us to *believe* they require our immediate attention, but they don’t. We should set aside time for Quad 2 items (see time blocking below) and those which can be delegated should be, those that are not a priority and we don’t have time for need to be declined/dismissed and if they are important and immediate, then we should move them to Quad 1.

Quad 3 items are the nourishment we need to maintain our balance. These are sleep, healthy relationships, exercise, meditation, and hobbies. While often overlooked because they are not immediate needs, they are very important to maintaining our productivity. Without replenishing ourselves, we become more susceptible to “burn-out.” We need to actively block out time for these important activities.

Finally, we have Quad 4, the not important or immediate box. I know you are wondering, why do I want to include these activities in my to do list if they are neither important or immediate. While we may not want to include them in our to-do lists, we often do. How much time do you spend scrolling through social media or the news feed? Shopping online? Fighting with your spouse or kids? Complaining about an adversary or our boss? These are all tasks that we unwittingly devote a block of our time to. We don’t have to eliminate everything, but when we are aware of where our time is going, when we see that these “time wasters” are taking away from our Quad 3 time, we can then make a deliberate choice about where to spend our time. If you can’t give up your timewaster, consider tying timewasters to Quad 3 activities. For instance, I can look at my news feed for five min-

utes *after* I complete my 10 minutes of meditation or set aside an hour to watch a show with friends or family that can inspire discussion to build relationships (personal current favorite, *Ted Lasso*).

Time Blocking

Time blocking helps us stay away from the productivity suck of task-switching. If we continue to disrupt our flow, we are more likely to lose our train of thought, make mistakes, and be less productive. Set aside a set amount of time to do your most difficult work, brief writing, contract review, etc. (your “Productivity Period”) and don’t allow interruptions during this time. This means not responding to emails, picking up the phone, chatting with the random person who walks by your desk, etc. These time blocks can be as short as 25 minutes to be effective. So, you can set aside 25 minutes for your thoughtful work and then take a 10-minute email break to go through your emails. You can quickly answer emails that only require a short response. You can flag important emails that require more thoughtful responses for your next Productivity Period and let the sender know you will get back to them later in the day. Staying on task can help reduce stress, produce higher quality work product, and save you time. You may find that you have the most focus first thing in the morning or maybe you are better late at night. You can time block around your personal productive times.

Decision Fixing

Time is so precious that we all want every minute we can get. We often don’t realize that when we have choices, the minutes we take to make a decision can add up. In addition, having too many choices can lead to stress. By removing choices, we can gain time and calm. We can automate some basic decisions like our wardrobe, meal choices, or food shopping. Create a standard food shopping list, set an old-fashioned meal menu (Taco Tuesdays!), create your uniform rotation (Steve Jobs and many other successful entrepreneurs wear the “same” uniform daily). By setting these basic functions on au-

to-pilot, we can save our energy and time for more important work. While it might seem small, if we eliminated these choice decisions, we might be able to get in that exercise or meditation routine or get an extra half hour of sleep!

Saying No (or Saying Yes to Productivity)

A wise partner once told me, drafting the most protective, “perfect” contract for your client that no one will sign or that blows up a deal is actually not perfect. Professional, quality work is not perfect. There, I said it—we do not need to be perfect. Productivity is not only about high quality, it is about efficient, high quality work in a reasonable time frame. Proof-reading your work is good, proofreading your work four times to ensure there is not a single typo is wasting your client’s money. Balance is the key to avoiding burnout.

Similarly, taking on too much work will lead to lower productivity and contribute to burnout, a real problem affecting attorneys today. Saying “No” to unreasonable and harmful demands is a skill that we need to cultivate in order to be and do our best. Becoming familiar with and using key phrases such as, “I would love to help, but my plate is full” or “I wouldn’t be able to give that project the time it deserves given my current projects” sets up your “no” in a thoughtful, non-dismissive tone. You can also consider whether by swapping some tasks that are more efficiently done by others can free you up for work that requires your level of knowledge and experience. Say “no” so you can say “yes.” Most importantly, use the time you save wisely and remember that self-care is not selfish. To perform at your best, you need to have balance and self-care is essential to your performance as an attorney, a mother or father, a son or daughter, a friend, and everything else you do and are.

Thoughtful End to the Day

Take 15 minutes at the end of each day to evaluate your day and learn from it. Do you need to re-prioritize your goals? Did



WORK LIFE:

MAKE SURE YOUR EMPLOYER IS ON THE SAME PAGE!

- COMMUNICATE!
- Be honest about your home situation
- Get employer buy-in by coming up with a plan
 - Propose a productive work model
 - Discuss time blocking strategies
 - Discuss work distractors
- What are the best days for you to be in the office?
- Be **clear** on deadlines—time block accordingly
- Check in with team members—schedule micro meetings and stick to micro timing



AT HOME WITH KIDS

FIND WAYS TO KEEP INTERRUPTIONS TO A MINIMUM

- **Toddlers/babies**—You need to have an adult on call; time block and do tasks that do not require focused concentration and/or household tasks that you can easily step away from when you are “on-call”
- **School age children**—Agree to “Classroom Rules” (when working, everyone works); time block and schedule breaks to take with kids
- **Teenagers**—Time block discussion time; great opportunity for them to learn independence
- **Separate spaces** (red/yellow/green post-it notes can show your kids if it’s emergencies only or if you have time to answer a quick question)

the task you thought would take an hour take three? Like any other activity we seek to master, time mastery takes practice and reflection. Refine your daily activities and experiment with what works for you.

The first step we need to take to achieve time mastery is to be aware of where you are spending your time. Taking the time to evaluate your time and your goals might require a little bit of effort to start but in the long run, the benefits are often well worth the effort. To avoid becoming discouraged, don’t try to tackle everything at once. Audit your time for seven days straight and then pick one habit to implement.

Habits are best formed with a **SNAP** mindset: **S**tart strong, **N**o exceptions, **A**lways act and **P**ractise the will. In order to start strong, you need to be deliberate with your practice and keep the challenge(s) manageable so you aren’t tempt-

ed to let the ball drop. Pick one thing, get good at that, and then cultivate the next “habit.” Habits are, by definition, something that becomes second-nature; if you allow for exceptions, the act doesn’t become ingrained, so no exceptions. Instead of preparing all meals for the week, start with a simple breakfast chart that you can easily follow and stick to. Build over time and soon all your meals will be fixed. Then start the next area that you want to change. By ensuring that you always act and practice the will to take these small incremental steps, you will build up your toolbox of helpful habits. Over time, your newfound habits will help you become a master of your time and energy! ■

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President's Message

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and shrink the access to justice gap then become more, the type of “daily small acts of self-denial” that accumulate for the collective good. Our profession, and the profound potential of our work, cannot be seen as limited only to the wealthy, and the elite. We must be seen as accessible and available to all, because this influences the public perception of our profession, and by extension the public perception of the rule of law.

Solutions abound, some existing, and some under discussion now. Expansion of pro bono programs,⁵ advocacy for legal services funding on the state and federal level,⁶ and efforts to advance a civil right to counsel⁷ are all areas of progress in recent years. Some also look to new technology, non-lawyer ownership of law firms, and new law firm business structures, seeking a market solution to the access to justice gap.⁸ However these

efforts advance in the coming years, one thing is certain: our profession is called to address the access to justice gap, and is uniquely situated to do so. Whether we do so effectively will rely upon our individual and collective will and efforts, for the greater benefit of society, and for our profession. ■

NOTES

1. Villazor, Rose Cuisson, “The Immigration Act of 1965 and the Creation of a Modern, Diverse America,” *Huffington Post Contributor Blog*, (Fall 2015) https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-immigration-act-of-19_b_8394570
2. “An Introduction to South Asian American History,” *South Asian American Digital Archive*, <https://www.saada.org/resources/introduction> (last retrieved on October 13, 2021)
3. The Constitution of the Connecticut Bar Association, Article II. https://www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/resources/cba-constitution-bylaws-and-procedures_7-31-18.pdf
4. “A lawyer should render public interest legal service. A lawyer may discharge this

responsibility by providing professional services at no fee or a reduced fee to persons of limited means or to public service or charitable groups or organizations, by service in activities for improving the law, the legal system or the legal profession, and by financial support for organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means.” *Connecticut Rule of Professional Conduct* 6.1

5. See generally, *CT Lawyer*, September/October 2021.
6. See e.g., “ABA Day Features Member-Advocates for LSC, Judicial Security” (April 19, 2021), <https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2021/04/aba-day-2021/#:~:text=ABA%20Day%20features%20member-advocates%20for%20LSC%2C%20judicial%20security,issues%20important%20to%20lawyers%20and%20the%20justice%20system>.
7. See Thomas, Cecil J., “Advancing Access to Justice in Unprecedented Times,” *CT Lawyer* (July/August 2021)
8. See e.g., “Utah became first state to change ethics regulations to allow for alternative business structures.” *ABA Journal*, February 1, 2021.

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Supreme Deliberations

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stands for the general rule that medical records prepared in the course of treatment are admissible under § 52-174(b), while medical records prepared for litigation are inadmissible because they were not made in the ordinary course of business. As for *Rhode's* apparent conclusion that an opportunity for cross-examination is an “absolute prerequisite” for the admission of a medical record, the *Rhode* Court had simply misunderstood *Struckman*.

DeMaria, then, replaces one rule with another. Following *Rhode*, the admission of a medical report under § 53-174(b) turned on whether the defendant had the opportunity to cross-examine its author; under *DeMaria*, the question is whether the report was prepared for use in treatment as opposed to litigation. One can only hope that the new civil test will prove easier to apply than *Crawford* has proven in the criminal context. ■