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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN ■ TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

Effectively Managing Your Time

In the midst of beginning billable client work and spending considerable time in on-the-job skills training, it's tough for new lawyers to get a clear sense of how long it takes to complete projects, especially when they face "emergencies." Along with trying to make new connections and maintain some semblance of a life outside the firm, it makes for a chaotic schedule. Fortunately, there are ways to maintain some control over your time.

Plan ahead. Write weekly and daily to-do lists. Develop a habit of writing the lists at the same time every time—for example, prepare your weekly to-do list each Monday morning and your next day's list at the end of the preceding day. Fifteen minutes on each will provide you with the focus and discipline you'll need during your workdays.

Segment and prioritize. Segment your to-do tasks by client or billable work, nonbillable firm activities, personal commitments and other categories that make sense for you. Distinguish between "urgent" versus "important" items. Sometimes in law firms, everything is characterized as a fire to put out. Don't overestimate the urgency of tasks. You can help diffuse crises by thinking ahead.

Track your routines. For two weeks, use a time log broken into 15-minute increments and record everything you

do during the day—encounters, personal conversations, things you read or must attend to. Determine where you can become more efficient, cut back, delegate or spend more time. Align your energy peak times with important activities, and take a break during low points in your cycle.

Minimize interruptions. Try to block out chunks of time for urgent and important projects. Have someone take messages for you and interrupt you only under a few, specified circumstances. There'll be times you'll have to close your office door so you're not disturbed. If need be, find an alternative space to get your work done.

Learn to delegate. You cannot do everything yourself so you'll have to learn to delegate those tasks that others can do—and allow them to do the tasks their way. Be clear about deadlines and deliverables, and track the status of the things you delegate.

The bottom line: Don't let time conflicts prevent you from acquiring the skills and habits you need to better control the tasks you manage. Becoming more proficient in time management will lead to greater success and satisfaction. ■



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Checklist

Tips for Time Management

- Create a "time profile" of your typical day or week. Determine how much time you spend doing what, as well as when your peak- or low-energy times occur.
- Use your time profile to evaluate and project realistic time frames for getting certain tasks or projects completed going forward.
- Spend fifteen minutes at the beginning of every day writing your to-do list for the day.
- Designate tasks as urgent, important or neither but still necessary.
- Minimize interruptions and reserve your peak-energy times for your most challenging or important tasks.
- Develop systems that help you manage files, information, articles, phone calls, e-mails, calendars, correspondence and the like. Use good filing and technology solutions that help you expedite tasks.
- Remember that no one is perfect—find out what is expected and acceptable.
- Build in time for people and activities that will help to re-energize you.