



MY OPINION

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Finding Time for What's Important

As the mother of two small children, I have become very aware of how quickly time flies. It seems like my kids have changed so quickly over the past two years that I can hardly keep up. Because I cannot get this time back, I want to make sure I do not miss a minute with them or my husband.

As attorneys, spending time with family or friends is hard because we are often ineffective time managers and we end up working more than enjoying the people in our lives. Most of us do not want our legacy to be: "She was always at the office; first one there, last one to leave." Learning to manage our time more effectively will help us prioritize our families, our friends, and our activities outside the practice of law.

I have found the following specific tips to be effective in my own practice when trying to manage my day, while still making it out the door in a timely manner.

Prioritize your tasks. Many times I find myself checking unimportant emails that are not time-sensitive instead of drafting a court order that is due on a specific date. In order to prevent these types of distractions, I make a list of the items that must be completed before I leave the office, and I focus on that list. By writing a list, I am able to see what must be accomplished that day and not drift off task. It also makes me feel more productive noting all that I accomplished that day (and can help with the formalized tracking of my time).

Delegate tasks to others. After nearly 10 years of practice, I have had to learn

to give tasks to my staff because I simply cannot accomplish everything on my own. In the beginning of my legal career, the supervising attorney for my summer clerkship reminded me that I actually needed to *use* the paralegal they were paying for. I laughed because I knew it would be hard for me to control the impulse to



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just do the work myself. This is an important tip: Many of us have a constant need to be perfect. But it is not a weakness to ask for help. Asking for assistance can help you manage your time more effectively. Plus, it will help those to whom you delegate become more invested in the tasks and the process.

Limit distractions. I eliminate distractions by blocking off time on my calendar and telling my legal assistants to limit my phone calls. By setting an appointment on the calendar, I have a designated time in which to get important work completed.

Take a vacation. This is critical to maintaining the passion for practicing law and for your own mental health. After taking time away from work, you feel rested and you can more effectively concentrate, which leads to better time management. If possible, turn your cell phone off and resist the urge to check your email in order to really spend quality time with your family and friends. The work will be there when you get back and your family will be grateful that you got to spend time together without the constant interruptions of your smartphone. Better yet, make a pact with your children or other loved ones that you will not pick up your phone for the day, the week, etc. — and *stick to it*.

While I cannot always say I am out the door at 5 p.m., I can say that I very seldom miss a T-ball game, a class party, or one of my husband's activities. The practice of law is stressful — be sure to find something outside of work that helps you relax or, at the very least, forget your professional duties for a few hours.

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