



10 Acts That Will Allow You to Use Your Time Better

by Twyla Sketchely

There are only 24 hours in a day. No more. No less. We cannot “manage” time to get more of it. Time is constant in how much we have and how fast it moves. However, we can manage our behavior to better use the time available to us. For lawyers, time is our stock in trade. Efficiently using time, allows lawyers to make a living. But, we often flit from file to file like busy bees, never really finishing a file’s project, merely addressing the most immediate need. This flitting (also referred as multi-tasking) is inefficient, distracting, creates errors that take more time to correct and creating potential liability. While time cannot be “managed”, lawyers can manage their behaviors to utilize the time they do have in the most efficient way.

1. **Start your day with a plan.**

The first thing an attorney should do at the beginning of each days is create a plan for the day. This plan should include tasks or projects that must be finished in that day with an estimate of the time it takes to finish them. **Example:** 1) Draft guardianship and incapacity petitions for Ms. Smith: 2.0 hours; 2) Meet with Mr. Doe to review 2013 annual accounting: 1.0 hour; Kiwanis lunch: 2.0 hours; 3) return phone calls at end of day: 1.0 hours; 4) return emails at end of day: 1.0 hours;

5) review incoming mail: 1.0. Ask staff to do a day plan, too. This allows you to know how much time staff has available to assist with your tasks. It also helps them to use their time more efficiently.

2. **Keep a To Do list.** Most lawyers have “a million” things to do every day and are unlikely to remember them all. A To Do list is an easy way to maintain organization in your office and in your mind. They can be created in word-processing programs or through email programs, are options in practice management software, and are available on all smart phones. Keep a master To Do list for all projects in your office and update it daily as part of your day plan. Break larger tasks into their component parts and put each part on the list as it needs to be done. Once you have a To Do list, it is easy to transfer projects and tasks into your day plan and into your calendar. And, the act of crossing something off the To Do list also provides you with a sense of accomplishment and progress throughout the day to keep you motivated.

3. **Schedule everything.** Calendars are not just for scheduling hearings and client appointments. Use your firm calendaring system

to schedule every appointment (with travel time as needed), every hearing or mediation (with travel time as needed), every deadline, blocks of time needed to produce motions or objections, every lunch (with travel time), client phone calls (with time to review the file before the call), and calls with opposing counsel (with time to review the file before the call). Scheduling your day in this way allows you to limit unnecessary interruptions and focus your attention on the projects that must be finished, preventing you from splitting your attention as you flit from file to file.

4. **Stop practicing in crisis mode.** Attorneys often tell me they have no time to do a day plan or keep up a To Do list be-

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Message from the Chair

by Teresa Byrd Morgan

Welcome to the 2014-2015 section year! As our section's new chair, I'm delighted to share with you some of our plans for the coming year, most of which are already well underway.

One of my primary goals for this year is to provide our members with more ways to get to know one another. Having been a solo practitioner for the past 17 years, I know first-hand how important it is to build and maintain good relationships with other lawyers. Throughout my solo career, I have availed myself of many opportunities to learn from and work with other attorneys around the state and the country. Yes, traveling for educational and networking opportunities is expensive and time-consuming. But WOW! What rewards I have gained! My colleagues and I have spent innumerable hours during breaks and after class sharing practice management experiences and tips, teaching each other the intricacies of esoteric legal principles that some of us just couldn't "get" in class, and showing each other the latest technology tricks we've just learned. I also derive great comfort from knowing that when I've exhausted all of the resources at my fingertips, I can pick up the phone and call a trusted colleague to help me unravel a legal issue that I simply couldn't work through on my own.

If you are flying solo or practicing in a small firm, building and maintaining a strong network of competent,

trustworthy colleagues can be the difference between having a mediocre practice, and having one that is truly excellent. With that in mind, following are some of the opportunities this section will provide to you during the coming year to build and strengthen your network!

Eighth Annual Solo & Small Firm Technology Conference: Yee haw!!! Have we got a jim-dandy networking opportunity for you! Solo and Small Firm Conference Chair Jennifer Kuykendall has planned our most exciting annual conference to date. "Wild, Wild Tech: Getting Down and Dirty With Technology" is a must-attend, technology-based learning experience. You won't be able to get this level of education at home because it is HANDS ON. Bring your laptops, notebooks and tablets, because you will be using them as you learn new tips and tricks from the masters. And, you'll receive more than just education and networking opportunities for your time and financial investment. You'll leave with valuable giveaways from our vendors that are worth much more than your registration fee. And, if you've always wanted to learn how to line dance, here's your opportunity! Join us as we kick up our heels and get down and dirty with technology!

Post-EC-Meeting Receptions: We scatter our executive council meetings around the state, and when we're in your neck of the woods, you are

invited to join us for a cocktail reception. Stop by after work to meet and mingle with our executive council members and your local colleagues, and be sure to invite a colleague to come along with you. This is a great opportunity for you to get to know our section's leadership and to learn more about how you can get involved. Calendar the reception closest to you: September 5th at The Breakers in West Palm Beach, November 7th at the One Ocean in Jacksonville Beach, and February 27th at the Plantation Inn in Crystal River. We will send you an email invitation when we're coming to your judicial circuit, and we hope you'll be able to join us.

Other CLE Programs: Former Section Chair Peggy Hoyt is hard at work planning an outstanding Ethics Seminar, which will be held on October 3rd in Tampa. And our always-outstanding Florida Law Update will be held at the Florida Bar Annual Meeting on June 25th at the Boca Raton Resort & Club.

Alaska Out-of-State CLE: Satisfy your sense of adventure and increase your knowledge of legal issues related to environmental and natural resources by joining us on our out-of-state trip to Alaska! We will cruise on a 490-passenger luxury ship from Anchorage to Vancouver, stopping at ports that the big ships can't access. What better way to bond with other attorneys than while exploring and learning about Alaska's unique geography, wildlife and other natural resources? This is sure to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

As we journey through the year, I will share with you additional opportunities to get connected with other section members. I also will update you on the ways in which our section is reaching out to help law students and practicing attorneys improve their skills and enhance their careers.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have ideas and input: tbmorgan@morganlawcenter.com. We are looking forward to a great year, and we hope you will be part of it!

The Florida Law Practice LINK is prepared and published by The Florida Bar General Practice, Solo & Small Firm Section.

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California Dreaming: GPSSF Out-of-State CLE Trip

by Teresa Morgan and Kevin Johnson

San Francisco Solo and Small Firm practitioners welcomed us to their beautiful city at a lovely reception held in The Palace Hotel. We appreciated the opportunity to meet some of our California colleagues and to learn about solo and small firm practice one of the largest, most diverse cities in the U.S.

One of the greatest highlights of our trip was our tour of Alcatraz, which served as a maximum security prison from 1934 to 1963. We took the Cellhouse Audio Tour, which was narrated by former correctional officers and prison inmates who lived on Alcatraz Island during the infamous Federal Penitentiary era. They brought this piece of history alive as they shared stories of failed escape attempts, solitary confinement, food riots, and the heartbreakingly

unreachable sounds and sights of life in San Francisco, just 1½ miles across the bay.

On Friday morning, we held our CLE session, titled “Representing Small Businesses with Skill and Creativity.” Stefan Rubin of the Business Law Section discussed the ins and outs of entity selection for small businesses. Kevin Johnson offered advice on how to deal with the twenty most common employment-law questions faced by small businesses. We heard from Camille Iurillo on how small businesses can deal with a cash crunch. Finally, Jason Putnam Gordon gave us some insight into the top ten things to consider before doing business in California.

Saturday welcomed us with gloriously beautiful weather and a Napa

Valley wine country tour. We began with a private tour of the Chandon winery, home of those luscious sparkling wines we love to improperly refer to as “champagne” here in the U.S. The tour was quite educational, but my favorite part was that we were treated to many tastings of Chandon’s very best wines!

We then enjoyed another private tour of Flora Springs winery, which was perched at the base of the Mayacamas Mountains, which is the widest point in Napa Valley. We wandered through the hillside caves and tasted wines, straight from the barrels! We then were treated to a gourmet lunch on the front porch of the historic Flora home, where we enjoyed fellowship with our travel mates, exquisite wine, and absolutely stunning panoramic views.



Affiliates Corner

News for Paralegals to Use...

Submitted by Priscilla Horn Warren, CP, FRP

Did you know that The Florida Bar's General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section was one of the first Sections formed over twenty years ago? Its members continue to be sought out by other lawyers and paralegals for answers to the myriad issues confronting the solo practitioner in Florida. Your valued input is an added perk – reach out today to become an Affiliate Member! It may be one of the best business and personal decisions you will ever make. Go to the Section's website for access to applications and more information: www.gpssf.org.

The PAF state chapter held its 2014 seminar on June 6-7, 2014, and the

new officers for the coming year were installed: President, Patricia DeRamus; First VP, Jodee Buck; Second VP, Bea Lavine; Secretary, Sylvia Cowen; and Treasurer, Donna Cooper. A one-day seminar in the Fall of 2014 is being planned in Brevard County. For additional news on the PAF chapters, please go to their website: www.pafinc.org.

On the national level, NALA has continued its efforts to streamline the CP/CLA exam for its paralegal members and chapters. The testing process is concise and thorough, and several pre-exam courses are offered throughout the year in various locations to accommodate those paralegals who wish to attain the national

certification designation. More detailed information can be found at NALA's website: www.nala.org.

In closing, the GPSSF Executive Committee is already planning the topics and speakers for its very successful annual workshop/conference in January, to coincide with The Florida Bar's Mid-Year meeting. Mark your calendar now for the end of January 2015 to attend this important two-day conference. It always contains valuable information on your workplace and workspace!

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. My direct email is: pris2323@yahoo.com.

GPSSF Annual Meeting

The GPSSF held its annual meeting on Friday, June 27 at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center. In addition to presenting the Walter S. Crumbley Award and Pro Bono Awards, new officers were elected and new members welcomed.

For the 2014-2015 term, Teresa Morgan is Chair, Damon Glisson is Chair-Elect, Jennifer Dietz is Secretary and Sean Desmond is Treasurer. New members to the Executive Council are Adam Hodkin, Joshua Hertz and Jay Kim. Four members were recognized with the title of Chair Emeritus: George Wilson (1985-1986), Jerry Currington (1994-1995), Craig Ferrante (2000-2001) and Jack Bettman (2002-2003).

Christopher Perez, Cooley Law School, will serve as Law Student Representative. The Executive Council extended our appreciation to Cynthia Clark for serving the past two years as Law Student Representative. We congratulate Cynthia on her graduation with Honors from Stetson University and her initiative in forming a Solo and Small Firm Society at Stetson University.

2013-2014 Chair,
Kevin Johnson
and Teresa Morgan,
2014-2015 Chair



GPSSF Board 2014 Bar Convention, Gaylord Palms



GPSSF Executive Council

Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. Wins the General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section's 2014 "L. Michael Roffino Pro Bono Award"

The General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section is pleased to announce the winners of the 2014 L. Michael Roffino Pro Bono Award.

The General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section's "L. Michael Roffino Pro Bono Award" was established in 1990 to be awarded on an annual basis in recognition of outstanding service and significant accomplishments by non-profit organizations which provide pro bono legal aid to the indigent.

Each fall the Section, working with the Florida Pro Bono Coordinators Association, accepts nominations of organizations that are providing innovative programs designed to deliver legal services to those who could not otherwise obtain legal help. The Section selects three winners and awards a \$3,000 grant



Kevin Johnson, John Feeno, Pam Fields, Jerry Curington and Kimberly Rodgers

to the overall winner and a \$1,000 grant to each of the two runners-up. In the past these grants have been used by these worthy pro bono organizations to acquire computers and software, to conduct legal clinics, to recruit and train volunteer lawyers, to create and produce forms, manuals and video tapes and to otherwise serve the legal

needs of Florida's poor who are in need of legal assistance.

This year's winner is: Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. and is being recognized for its project entitled Private Attorney Involvement Program which provides extended legal aide services to pro se litigants beyond the courts and into the Division of Administrative Hearings. The two runners-up are Legal Aid of Manasota, Inc. and Community Law Program, Inc.

The Section is pleased to announce that since the inception of this award, the Section has awarded a total of \$119,500 to 25 different winners and runners-up. The Section encourages every pro bono and voluntary bar organization to apply every year so that the Bar can recognize the outstanding efforts of Florida's selfless pro bono and voluntary bar organizations.

Mark Your Calendars for next year's Solo & Small Firm Conference: Jan. 23-24, 2015, at the Hilton Lake Buena Vista. "Wild, Wild Tech: Getting Down and Dirty with Technology" will be a hands-on tech learning experience featuring a variety of invaluable networking opportunities, including a practice-area lunch and speed networking. Next year's chair, Jennifer Kuyrkendall, is already working on incorporating your feedback from the 2014 Conference to make next year's conference even better. If you have suggestions, please email Jennifer directly.



Jennifer Kuyrkendall
2015 Conference Chair

"This seminar was one of the best, if not the best, CLE programs I have attended / listened to in my over 20 years as an attorney. The speakers were all excellent, not boring, and actually gave down-to-earth, practical information. I am not tech-savvy by any means but I hope to become more so after listening to this program. I plan to incorporate many of the tips and other information from the seminar as soon as possible into my own work and the work of the staff attorneys and magistrates who work in our court."

Robin S. Berghorn
General Counsel
Ninth Judicial Circuit

**Wild, Wild Tech: Getting Down
and Dirty with Technology**

WANTED

Lawyers who want to learn

- **About the "Cloud"**
- **Going paperless**
- **Effectively using Word, Excel, Outlook and PDF's**
- **Technology in the courtroom**
- **Maximizing your dollar for legal research**
- **Practice Management Tips**
- **Much, much more!**



REWARD



- **CLE hours**
- **\$\$\$'s of give-a-ways**
- **Networking opportunities**



WHEN: January 23 · 24, 2015

WHERE: Orlando Hilton Lake Buena Vista

SIGN-UP: www.gpssf.org

Ask the Risk Manager

by Nancy Stuparich, FLMIC's Risk Manager

As a solo practitioner or a member of a small firm, lawyers often find themselves in leadership roles with very little notice or training. Unfortunately, not all lawyers are born leaders and leadership courses are not required courses in law school. The good news is that many of the skills and characteristics taught voluntarily and sometimes perhaps involuntarily in leadership positions can also provide the foundation for implementation of good risk management practices.

In Florida Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company's ("FLMIC") 2nd Quarter 2014 Advisor, Director Juliet Roulhac highlights some of the common leadership characteristics and skills that may also help an attorney avoid a legal malpractice claim. These characteristics and skills included competence, earning the trust and respect of others by preserving confidential information and having good communication skills. Once acquired, these leadership characteristics and skills can lead to the development of other leadership qualities that can also help mitigate practice risks associated with the delegation of tasks to others such as calendaring important court and client dates, review of trust account and billing records, document management, etc.

The General Practice, Solo & Small Firm Section of The Florida Bar provides its members with many opportunities to further develop or acquire leadership skills that can be included in a firm's risk management program. What better way to develop communication skills than by volunteering to work with others as a team on one of the Section's committees or projects or by participating in one of the Section's networking events. The Section's annual conference has been identified as the "go to" continuing legal education event for solo and small firm practitioners to develop technology competency, which can be shared with others in your firm, especially in view of the changes in the practice of law resulting from new technologies.

Leadership skills can also be acquired from participation in The Florida Bar's Leadership Academy, now



in its second year. Created in 2013, The Florida Bar's Leadership Academy gives attorneys the skills and resources needed to become leaders in The Florida Bar and in their firms. FLMIC is a sponsor of The Florida Bar's Leadership Academy. Other opportunities for leadership development also exist in local communities through local voluntary bar associations and chambers of commerce.

Read FLMIC's 2nd Quarter 2014 Advisor newsletter, available free at www.flmic.com, to learn more about how leadership skills can assist in your firm's risk management practices. Without a leader in the firm or your practice, the risks of a legal malpractice or bar grievance can be more easily managed.

Florida Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company ("FLMIC") was created by The Florida Bar in the late 1980s as a benefit to its members to provide a perpetual source of professional liability insurance for Florida attorneys. FLMIC is now a mutual company owned by its policyholders, who are all Florida attorneys. This article is intended to provide general information to assist lawyers and their staff to develop and enhance risk management procedures. For advice on specific legal questions, consult experienced legal counsel. For advice on ethical conduct consult The Florida Bar. Implementation of the suggestions in this article are not warranted, expressed or implied to prevent claims nor to establish a standard of care as the conduct recommended may be above the legal standard of due care. While all materials presented are carefully researched, no warranty, express or implied is offered to the accuracy of this information. Reproduction in any manner of the material herein requires written permission.



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cause they have too much to do. They then describe their work day tasks as “putting out fires.” While everyone has chaotic days, the majority of your time should not be spent “putting out fires”. Operating in crisis mode means you are spending most of your time fixing immediate and urgent problems, have little control over the amount of time you spend on that problem, are spending too much time on one particular file, and are leaving other files to develop crises. You are also unlikely to be billing for all the time you have spend “putting out fires”. If you feel like you spend too much time operating in crisis mode, ask yourself why your files are always in crisis. Are your clients failing to respond to your requests for information in a timely manner? Are you forgetting to ask your clients for information in a timely manner? Are you taking on cases that have immediate deadlines and insufficient time to properly prepare? Are you waiting to complete tasks until the day before or day of deadlines? Do you have too many files to manage? Do you have clients who fail to communicate with you or follow your instructions? Are you missing deadlines? Do you have insufficient assistance with routine tasks? Figure out why you operate in crisis and fix the underlying problem immediately. Fixing the problem will free up time and allow you to use your time more efficiently.

5. Schedule reviewing and re-turning emails. Many attorneys spend the day with the email box open. Each time the attorney is notified of a new email, she stops and responds. If you are one of those attorneys, STOP. Simply because someone can send instant communication, doesn’t mean the response should be instant. Stopping in the middle of a task to answer an email, requires you to change focus, orient to the new

task and complete it. When you finish responding to the email, you then have to return to the previous task, and review where you left off, wasting more time to regain your focus before you can complete it. Schedule a period of time each day to review and respond to emails. Some attorneys respond at the end of the day while others respond every two to three hours. This author responds right before lunch and right before leaving the office in the evening. This limits my response time and allows me to ignore the sweet emails of cute puppies and kittens that colleagues and client send me in their “free” time.

6. Schedule returning phone calls. Telephone calls should be treated the same way you treat emails: hold them all and return them at a particular time each day. If a call will take more than ten minutes of your time, ask your assistant to schedule a specific time with the client or colleague to hold the call when the caller will have your attention and you will have the file in your hand. As with emails, answering every call requires you to stop mid-task, change your focus, complete the call, and then reorient yourself to the previous task. Like emails, this author schedules telephone responses right before lunch and right before leaving the office to limit distractions and response time.

7. Track your time. According to Abraham Lincoln, “a lawyer’s time and advice are his stock in trade.” In other words, your time is one of your most valuable assets. What other asset do you have that you fail to track? Banks send regular statements for accounts showing every penny in and out of the account with a precise balance. We receive regular mortgage statements showing the mortgage and escrow account balances. Even grocery receipts itemize every purchase with its cost. Why is your time any less valuable than a carton of milk? Tracking time allows you to monitor how you spend your day and

modify your behavior. Even if you bill in flat fees or on a contingency basis, you still need to know how you use your time each day. There are also instances when you can be required to produce time records to justify your fees or to demonstrate you completed certain tasks and your time records may be the only way to do this.

8. Eliminate distractions. To efficiently use your time, decide what you are using your time for and eliminate the distractions that do not serve that purpose. If you are using your time at the office to produce work (and make a living), then eliminate tasks that fail to serve that purpose. Stop checking your personal Facebook, Twitter, email, or cell phone voicemail while you are working. If you have or are in charge of monitoring your firm’s Facebook, Twitter, blog, or voicemail, set aside a specific time each day for that specific task. In addition, set rules for when and how your staff can interrupt you with non-emergency questions. Unpredictable staff interruptions can be just as damaging to your efficiency as checking your personal Facebook page while you are writing a motion.

9. Set reminders to alert you to schedule changes. Because there is only so much time in a day, spending a whole day on one task is unrealistic. As part of the calendaring process, create reminders that alert you ten minutes before the next appointment or task begins. This allows you to wrap up the task you are working on and prepare to start the next task.

10. Delegate. Many tasks can be completed by staff members whose time is less valuable, in terms of generating revenue, than yours. Delegating those tasks allows you generate more billable work in the limited time you have available. Staff can answer phones, take messages, e-file pleadings and documents, schedule appointments or hearings, open mail, do filing, scan files, and create

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simple pleadings like notices and standard form motions. Generally, these are tasks for which an attorney cannot bill a client, so spending attorney time on them is inefficient or unprofitable.

While lawyers have yet been unable to create more time in a day, they can change a few behaviors that will make them feel like they have more time. The more efficiently a lawyer uses time, the more profitable she can become.

Twyla Sketchley, B.C.S. is a Florida Bar Board Certified Elder Law

Attorney with *The Sketchley Law Firm, P.A.* in Tallahassee, Florida. She is the current Chair of the Florida Bar Law Office Management Assistance Service (LOMAS) Advisory Board and the Immediate Past Chair of the Florida Bar Elder Law Section. Ms. Sketchley provides law practice management consulting and coaching to solo and small firms.

GENERAL PRACTICE, SOLO & SMALL FIRM SECTION

2014 – 2015 Calendar

Executive Council Meeting

September 5, 2014

The Breakers

Palm Beach

Annual Ethics Seminar

October 3, 2014

Renaissance International Plaza

Tampa

Executive Council Meeting

November 7, 2014

One Ocean

Jacksonville Beach

Solo & Small Firm Conference

“Wild, Wild Tech: Getting Down and Dirty with Technology”

January 23-24, 2015

Orlando Hilton Lake Buena Vista

Executive Council Meeting

February 27, 2015

Plantation Inn

Crystal River

Out-of-State-CLE Trip

May 27-June 3, 2015

Alaskan Cruise

Florida Law Update 2015

June 25, 2015

Boca Raton Resort and Club