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Paralegal PERSPECTIVES

Time management for a better workday

One of the biggest challenges many paralegals face in our careers is managing our time effectively in order to get things done during the time frame allotted to the task.

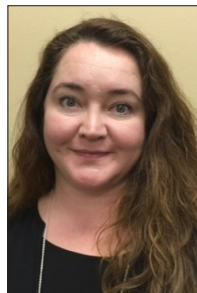
Your time — whether it is billable to the client or not — is important to manage because the work still needs to get done and preferably in a well-organized fashion.

Over time, I have learned that when I start my day with a “To Do” list, the day tends to go more smoothly — even when those pesky emergency matters pop up. So if your New Year’s resolution is to improve your time-management skills, I offer the following:

Start by writing down your plan for the day. Take 15 minutes every day to lay out what needs your attention, and prioritize those tasks for the day. Remember to include the routine tasks that need to get done daily as well: reviewing and replying to emails or telephone calls, opening new mail, filing documents away. Also, pencil in breaks to walk away from your desk so your mind and body have time to recharge and refocus on what needs to be done.

Prioritizing tasks often relates to the “big picture” of the file, so it is important to know what tasks that needs to be done immediately or at a future date. You can stay on task if you have a list of tasks the items that need to be done in the future (next week, what month and within the year ahead), as well.

Waiting on additional information before you can move ahead with a file impacts time management as well.



By **BOBBI L. AHEARN**
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Therefore, you need to be clear as to what it is you are waiting on, who you need it from, who is responsible for collecting it and follow up when needed. Communicate with your attorney(s) and clients about what you are working on so that you all stay on the same page in order to minimize frustration. This way, when something needs to be done by a specific date, you can determine whether you need to break the task down into smaller time slots over time or set aside a longer block of time to accomplish the desired result.

Minimize personal conversations when appropriate. It is perfectly acceptable to let your colleagues know that you are working on managing your time as efficiently as possible so that you can accomplish your work in a timely manner. You also need to learn and respect how your colleagues manage their time; it won’t always mirror yours, and in order to manage time effectively you need to learn each other’s style and communicate how you can work collaboratively to get things done.

Believe me, they will understand and appreciate that you are taking their workload into consideration as well.

Minimize other “time wasters” such as looking for files, documents and related information. This often can be

accomplished through the use of technology.

Love it or hate it (or somewhere in between), technology is an essential part of our work day and is here to stay. You want to be as efficient and informed as possible and your employer and clients do as well! It’s the little things that can impact time management negatively or positively. Make it your goal this year to learn something new that will enhance your productivity at work. It can be as simple as organizing emails, learning how to save documents in your computer system so they are searchable not only by you (because you are familiar with the file and its contents) but also by anyone else in your office, as needed. Learn how to use various functions of Microsoft Word to make document creation more streamlined, or learn how to create spreadsheets in Excel. The possibilities are endless!

Achieving balance between home life, work and volunteer opportunities (all of which make you uniquely you) can be accomplished, but you have to make a plan and then work that plan. Effective time management can help you achieve that balance. By taking the time every day to plan ahead, before you know it, you will be less stressed and when that pesky emergency comes up — because you know they do — you can manage it well.

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