



IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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MANAGING LIFE AND WORK

At a recent gathering of Oregon Women Lawyers, program participants discussed the difficulties of meeting billable-hour requirements, managing workloads, and maintaining a fulfilling life outside of work. This article summarizes the program participants' coping strategies and suggestions.

DESIGN A GOOD WORK ENVIRONMENT

We spend a great deal of time in our workspace – no matter where it is. Surround yourself with things that make you feel good. Photographs, classical music, relaxation tapes, art, and warm lighting are all helpful ways to make your office feel more comfortable and pleasant.

Think about *where* you would like to work. For some people, working at home provides a good way to blend personal life and work. For others, a complete separation of work and personal life is preferable and can only be accomplished if work is not brought home. Some people opt to telecommute when possible, while others find that a physical separation between work and home makes home more relaxing and work easier to manage. There are many types of work options, so give some thought to what works best for you.

SET BOUNDARIES

Communicate with your clients so that they have realistic expectations about their case, how they can reach you, and how quickly you will be able to return their calls. Although your clients may want your constant attention and want you at their beck and call, setting boundaries and clari-

fying expectations will make your attorney-client relationship go much more smoothly.

MANAGE YOUR TIME

Break down big problems into smaller pieces. Be realistic and accepting about what you can accomplish. Take into consideration the difficulty of the task when allocating time for it, and prioritize according to deadlines. Create a time line for each stage of case preparation, and use the time line to move the case forward. Use organizing tools that work for you, such as calendars, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and to-do lists. Schedule blocks of time to respond to email and voicemail. Schedule time to close your door, use the “do not disturb” function of your telephone, and tell the receptionist to route all calls to voicemail so that you have uninterrupted time to get your work done. Schedule a day to catch up with paperwork, mail, billing, and other administrative tasks and do not allow any appointments or anything else to be scheduled for that day.

TAKE BREAKS

Get up from your desk and take breaks. Leave your workspace and take a walk, go shopping, run errands, or make personal calls. If you have a personal appointment, try not to cancel it due to work pressures. Exercise before work or some time during the day. Find a friend or co-worker to take a break or walk with you. When you actually put scheduled breaks on your calendar, it will be easier to take them. Exercise, drink plenty of water, and try to get fresh air daily.

KEEP PERSPECTIVE

Although it is important to be conscientious and represent your client well, it is

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also important to keep in mind that we are all human and we do make mistakes. Fortunately, most mistakes can be corrected. Even if you make a mistake that cannot be corrected, your client is still protected by your malpractice coverage.

In addition, keep the perspective that you are hired by the client to provide legal advice. Limit your advice to *legal* advice, and refer your clients to other professionals when they need counseling, financial planning, or other assistance.

MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

When your work schedule is hectic, it takes some effort to maintain relationships, personal hobbies, and interests outside of work. For some people with very busy schedules, blocking out time on the calendar for friends, family, alone time, hobbies, and workouts can be helpful. Planning vacations in advance and buying tickets for events such as concerts or plays can help you to socialize and take time off. For many people, scheduling monthly or weekly events with friends allows for socializing on a regular basis.

Using a designated time, such as early mornings, for household chores or bill paying can free up time for family and friends. Another strategy is to do the tasks in small parts.

Recognize that you cannot do everything. Consider hiring a person to help with household cleaning, home maintenance projects, or yard work. Enlist the participation of your spouse, or significant other, and children.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Exercise regularly. Take a vacation, a long weekend off, or a day off. Include time to do what recharges you. Consider taking a new class, listening to music, or meditating. Treat yourself to something special or let someone else treat you to something special, such as an evening or dinner out. Although we have all heard this advice over and over, we need to encourage ourselves, and each other, to really do it.

If you would like help balancing your personal and professional life, or feel anxious or over-

whelmed, please call the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program.

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For additional information on these topics, see Rhode, Deborah L., Balanced Lives: Changing the Culture of Legal Practice. A copy of the publication can be downloaded at www.abanet.org; click on Member Groups, then Commissions, then Commission on Women in the Profession, then Publications and Reports, then Balanced Lives Report.