



The Balanced Lawyer

Jeff Davidson

A Little Perspective, Please

When did you last have lunch with a colleague and discuss ways to approach your work more effectively? If recently, good for you. After a few minutes, perhaps, you're both deep into the conversation, coming up with all sorts of great ideas on how to accomplish your tasks. However, when the waiter comes to take your order or bring your check, what happens? The conversation dies down. When you both go back to work, those ideas are often forgotten or put on a back burner. Your discussion generated ways you can be more effective which, perhaps, are now lost.

Here is welcome news: If you schedule a meeting for the sole purpose of allowing the creative sparks to fly, you'll grab control of your time and enjoy some of the most productive sessions you've ever had. As a case in point, years



back I would meet with a mentor once a month in his dining room. At a cleared table, we'd sit across from each other with our digital recorders, discussing problems and issues that face us and ways we can overcome them. Later, we made notes on what was recorded. We captured those ideas instead of letting them die.

The over arching observation is that when you come in contact with other people, you're exposed to whole new worlds: their worlds. When you interact with another person, you have the potential to benefit from his/her information.

The View At 30,000 Feet

You're flying in an airplane. You have a window seat, and it's a clear day. As you gaze down to the ground below, what do you see? Cars the size of

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ants. Miniature baseball diamonds. Hotels that look like Monopoly pieces. Life passing by. The same effect can take place at the top of a mountain or a skyscraper. When things seem to be racing by too fast, get to higher ground for a clear perspective of what needs to be accomplished.

Perhaps you can regularly allocate time for reflection or meditation. If you don't, no matter. There are other ways to slow it all down. After the workday, listen to relaxing music with headphones with your eyes closed. A half hour of your favorite music with no disturbances (and your eyes closed) can seem almost endless. When you re-emerge, the rest of the day takes on a different tone and you're able to get more done than before. Hereafter, seek new ways to shake up your routine for any insights and breakthroughs that might result. Every day and every moment holds great potential.

Grin And Bear It

How many times do you actually let out a good laugh during the day, especially during the work day? Five-year-olds reportedly laugh 113 times a day, on average. However, 44-year-olds laugh only 11 times per day. Something happens between the ages of 5 and 44 to reduce the chuckle factor.

Once you reach retirement, fortunately, you tend to laugh again. The trick is to live and work at a comfortable pace and have a lot of laughs along the way, at every age. When you proceed through the work day without humor, the days tend to be long and difficult, independent of your case load.

Being in control of your career means being able to occasionally step back, look at the big picture, and see the lighter side of things. Some of your worst gaffes will eventually evolve into the things you pleasantly recall; a "mistake" could end up being one of your best ideas.

Fight For Perspective

By altering our personal perspectives — our perceptions, our response to stimuli, even the pace

at which we proceed throughout the day — we have the opportunity to proceed in a manner that is more manageable, less complex, and more enjoyable. The key is to develop a mindset that both acknowledges the multitude of items competing for our time and attention while concurrently acknowledging that we have the capabilities and the intelligence to rise above the fray.

You possess the distinct capability to adopt seemingly minor work-style changes that result in major gains in peace of mind and accomplishment.

Much of what seems urgent and compelling is not necessarily so. Sometimes the single best strategy for facing challenging tasks is to slow down. Regardless, you have the ability to pause momentarily throughout the day to mentally, emotionally, and spiritually renew yourself. By honing and refining your personal systems for accomplishment, you will be more adept at handling crises, big and small. Miraculously, you can actually have a calming effect on those all around you!

Over-Preparation And Its Consequences

One of the most common mistakes that career professionals make on the path to accomplishing short-term tasks is over-preparing, while at the same time underestimating what will be necessary to succeed.

Over-preparation has hindered many would-be achievers. How so? The over-prepared lawyer means to do well. His anxiety level, however, might contribute to him over-complicating one sub-task after another en route to actually winning a case. This is the person who, on the day of summation, is bound to blow it: He's so ready that he has more information than he'll ever be able to succinctly present to the jury. Besides trying to cramp in every little point, he may come off as less confident and less persuasive than otherwise.

Less can be more! If you can, forsake the crutches that seemingly aid, but often impede your

progress. The crutch which most often impedes us is information.

Outside of the courtroom, more data is not always the answer, especially in a society where we're deluged with data. For most business and personal matters, enough data exists to lead to all answers, which clearly gets in the way of choosing. Forsaking crutches simply means you will not allow extraneous factors to impede your progress. If you have five magazine articles that support your argument, having an additional four or five articles is not going to make that much of a difference.

You don't want to fall into the trap of rounding up resources that, in retrospect, will prove to be only marginally helpful and draw unnecessarily from the time you expend on the task at hand. People who tend to over-prepare either believe, or have deluded themselves into believing, that all the crutches they've assembled will somehow accelerate their progress once they finally launch into their task. Too late, they find that they've allocated their time and energy in the wrong places.

Underestimating Hindrances

The problem faced by otherwise competent professionals is that they often underestimate the time that it will take to complete a task; this happens even for short-term tasks. This is the person who is perpetually racing the clock. His to-do list grows longer and longer because he is inappropriately optimistic about how much he can accomplish in a day, perhaps an hour.

Understandably, in the information-based society engulfing us, it can be difficult to estimate how much time it will take to complete a particular task, especially for novel tasks. Moreover, you can make a strong argument that most of the tasks you face on any given day are "first-time" tasks, and the time to complete them in is not abundantly clear at the outset. That's why it's useful to establish benchmarks and set time limits. On any project or task, big or small, it pays to total up what it will cost in terms of time, energy, dollars, or other resources.