



The Balanced Lawyer

Jeff Davidson

Step Out of Your Own Pressure Cooker

It's not just your clients—the world in general is becoming ever more demanding. Much of what is foisted upon us comes in the form of information and communication. As we proceed through work and life, presumably we begin to understand the importance of:

- Being more selective;
- Becoming and staying organized;
- Saying no;
- Maintaining balance; and
- Living in the moment.

Too many lawyers operate as if they've never heard of these notions or, if they have, they pay them extremely short shrift. Such individuals proceed at full bore; they don't seem to have established, let alone pursue, a balanced set of priorities and they shortchange themselves of essential nutri-



tion, relaxation, and sleep. So, how do you operate at a more sane pace?

Capture the Moment

Living in the moment remains one of the least understood, infrequently addressed and seldom used human capabilities. Too few individuals have any experience or knowledge of living in the moment; it is lost among a flurry of activity—"busy-ness." Living in the moment means proceeding through your day with vibrant expression and keen perception, with an intense awareness of your surroundings. It's beginning each day with the thought, "I'm alive, and this day is only starting."

Living in the moment means being aware of your power in the present. It is being able to observe the finely woven canvas of your career while

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you are in progress. Living in the moment is giving yourself permission to be who you are. It is actually resting when you are tired. It means not having to constantly strive. Sure, in the short sometimes you have to burn the midnight oil. In the long run, however, that will lead to either a lousy life, an unfulfilling career, or both.

Freed from the preoccupation that limits your experience of the present, you may feel more present than you have in years, increasing your ability to focus and get things done. Once you realize what it means to dwell in real time and how far you may have strayed from the mark, there are several things you can do to begin to catch up with today (or at least this week). Many are deceptively simple, but don't let that obscure the powerful results they offer. Foremost is giving yourself permission to take time-outs at work as you deem them to be necessary.

Who's Holding the Whip?

During my travels, I have been struck by the legions of people in my audiences who seem perpetually overwhelmed. The irony is that these individuals could take breaks throughout their days and weeks, but they don't. The biggest obstacle to winning back your time is the unwillingness to allow yourself a break while accomplishing your tasks.

I spoke to one group of attorneys and their spouses at their annual retreat, and I learned from many spouses that their lawyer husbands or wives simply do not allow themselves to take a break. Paradoxically, increasing evidence indicates that such professionals will be more effective if they pause for an extra minute a couple of times each day. This can be done every morning and afternoon: when returning from the water cooler or restroom, before leaving for lunch, or when returning from lunch. And that's only the short list.

Seven hours and fifty minutes of work plus ten one-minute intervals of rest or reflection in a work-

day makes you more productive than doing eight solid hours of work. Okay, you work eleven-hour days? Ten hours and forty five minutes of work plus fifteen one-minute intervals of rest or reflection in a work day makes you more productive than doing fifteen solid hours of work. To insist on proceeding full-speed through the day to get things done without allowing yourself moments to clear your mind all but guarantees you'll be less effective than those who do.

Clarity Happens

Lawyers running their own businesses and managing themselves could take strategic pauses throughout the day; after all, they're in charge of their own schedules. Too often, the temptation to overwork is ferocious.

Conversely, if you work for others, perhaps in a large firm, and you're trying to make partner, you might erroneously believe that pausing for ten or fifteen strategic minutes throughout a work day could somehow jeopardize your standing. This misconception is unfounded. The founder partners in many top firms routinely take naps at midday to recharge their batteries. They have executive assistants who shield them from the outside world and handle their routine matters while they snooze.

If you are not the top dog in your firm, the thought of being able to take a nap in the middle of the workday may seem like Nirvana to you. Yet, the ten to fifteen strategic minutes I have recommended provide nearly a similar benefit in your quest to achieve. If you can't take a flat-out nap, ten to fifteen well-placed minutes might be your best alternative.

You can't charge through the day full throttle and expect to be at your peak level all the while. Be realistic. You need to consistently take breaks to ensure that you stay sharp, stimulate your circulation, and handle necessities. As lunch time approaches,

reevaluate what you've done, and how you plan to proceed during the afternoon.

In general, any time you feel yourself getting bogged down with all the tasks you need to complete in the day, take a walk or switch to another task for which you have sufficient energy. Do anything else which will help to minimize tension, keep you alert, and help you to stay more productive throughout the remainder of the day. Think of it this way: execute, reflect, reevaluate, and proceed.

If you find yourself distracted at work, experiment with the times when you tackle certain tasks. Maybe it makes sense for you to come in an hour earlier than everyone else, or to stay an hour later. Maybe it makes sense for you to eat lunch at a dif-

ferent time so that you can work during the traditional lunch hour.

Break Up Your Week

If you can work off-site one day a week, or depending on your firm, only once every two weeks, you'll be in a good position to accomplish certain types of tasks more adroitly than in the traditional office.

Also, if you're able to telecommute and stay in touch with your office, you've saved physical commuting time and wear and tear on your car. You've also prolonged the lifetime of your wardrobe and afforded yourself the chance to get an extra half-hour of sleep the night before!