

Maintaining the balancing act

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

January 2007

Every client I have ever served struggles with this one to some degree. And as I work with my clients to focus on business development, it helps if they can learn to manage their time more effectively. In most cases by changing a routine or habit you can learn to become more effective at time management. Here are a few tips.

“I am struggling with trying to balance my required billable hours with my business development efforts. Do you have any tips on how to become more effective at time management?” -Second-year associate

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How to start your day

One simple little tip is to get into the habit everyday of taking 10 minutes the first thing you walk into your office to prioritize your day. That way when things start coming at you, you can look at your list, remain focused and get through your day with less stress. When it appears that everything is priority, take a second look — something can wait, and I don't mean your lunch or workout.

How to finish your day

Take the last few minutes at the end of your day to review it. Did you get everything done you needed to? If not, how is that going to affect tomorrow? Always be planning. Always be reviewing. It will keep you focused and on track.

Weekly

Try getting into the habit every Friday afternoon before you head to the lawyers'

lounge to organize your office and your desk. If files are all over the place, take a few minutes to organize them. Think about walking into your office on Monday morning to a clean and organized environment. How will that affect the way you start your week?

Deadlines

So you have an upcoming discovery meeting, or a trial, or you are working on a contract or file that has a very clear and inflexible deadline. Try setting your deadline for completion two days ahead of time. If you can set it even earlier, do it. This will give you the luxury of time. What this does is invaluable. By setting your deadline ahead of time, you can allow yourself to break from that file and either focus some time with your business development efforts or other files.

When you get into this habit you will also find that when you go back to that file, with fresh eyes and a clear mind, you will find something or even many things that you can improve upon. You will make fewer mistakes and the finished product will be better. This is

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Gary Mitchell

GEM Communications Inc.

Suite 675

142-757 West Hastings St.

Vancouver, BC

V6C 1A1

(604) 669-5235

www.gemcommunications.ca

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Maintaining the balancing act

really effective when you have a number of things on the go. You have heard of the expression 'a change is as good as a rest'; it's true.

Avoiding distractions

You are sitting at your desk working on a file and you keep getting interrupted with e-mails. Some of them are urgent, some of them are not, and it keeps you away from finishing what's in front of you. Turn off your e-mail program until you get your work done. Or if it is a large project, then set times throughout the day that you will block off to check and respond to e-mail. You will know for yourself depending on the clients and files that you are working on how often you should be checking your e-mail. Take control of your technology so it doesn't control you.

Plan ahead for success

For every meeting, function, event or follow-up, plan ahead to ensure success. Set a list of objectives you wish to achieve. Prioritize them so if time runs out you can at least accomplish the most important ones. This will ensure you are not wasting any time at networking events, at a follow-up lunch, etc. You will see results immediately.

This article first appeared in the January 12, 2007 issue of The Lawyer's Weekly.

Gary Mitchell is the managing director of GEM Communications Inc. a firm specialized in marketing, business development, management training and implementation for law firms. He serves on the board of directors for the Legal Marketing Association, Vancouver Chapter as the chair of the marketing and media committee. Gary can be reached at gary@gemcommunications.ca



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