



Lawyers and Time Management by Jodi L. Wyman

One of the biggest obstacles faced by lawyers is likely a problem for most professionals – time management. Lawyers regularly complain about being way too busy and struggling to keep up with the workload. As the skilled workforce shortage continues, the problem will only get worse.

Unfortunately, this problem is noticed by clients as well. One of the most common complaints to the Law Society about lawyers is that they are too slow making progress on files. Other concerns expressed by clients, such as not returning phone calls or responding to letters, being late or missing court dates, likely often stem from lawyers having too much work and not being able to keep up. It may not be deliberate behaviour on the part of the lawyer, but the client is entitled to a reasonable level of service.

On the other hand, clients need to have reasonable expectations. If a lawyer has a good reputation and has been recommended to them by a number of people, then that lawyer is probably very busy. Calls cannot always be returned the same day, but to expect a

call back within forty-eight hours is not unreasonable.

Delays in progress on the file can be as a result of a backlog in the court system or because of opposing counsel or other parties. Slow progress may not be the lawyer's fault, but the client is at least entitled to be regularly informed as to what is the cause of the hold up.

Even more concerning, being too busy can lead to sloppy work and therefore costly errors. Lawyers, and all busy professionals, have to make it a priority to manage their file load, and their time, wisely.

There are a huge variety of books, courses, seminars and articles on effective time management. Interestingly, some of the best tips are the simplest and they apply to anyone with a great deal of work to deal with.

There are numerous ways to organize a work day and to keep track of the various things that have to be done. There is no one right way to be organized, but having some sort of system is crucial. The list of things to do should be listed by priority. Otherwise, human nature will have us doing the

easiest tasks over the more difficult ones.

Email and phone calls are the most common distraction for lawyers. It takes discipline to check email only once or twice a day. There is nothing wrong with letting the phone go to voice mail for an hour or two each day to concentrate on a challenging file.

Procrastination is a difficult challenge for many people. There are a number of ways to break some of those barriers. For example, try just working on the file for fifteen minutes. Committing to that does not seem so daunting, but it can break the mental barrier. One other suggestion is to figure out why there are certain files that always get relegated to the corner of your desk and ignored. It may be time to make some changes in your work or transfer the file to someone else.