# Boosting Productivity In A Legal Environment

BY GREGORY PETERSON

24 hours. That's the same blank "time sheet" of opportunity facing every legal professional every day of the week. As each of those days comes to a close, however, different people will have produced radically different accomplishments during the same time period. Even if you're already a highly productive individual, can you resist the prospect that there may be many ways to get more done in less time?

It's not just a question of racking up hours-on-the-job (although work productivity is the focus of this essay). Productivity is about doing the most important things — efficiently and effectively — and making conscious decisions to exclude the time-consuming distractions that keep us from our highest goals.
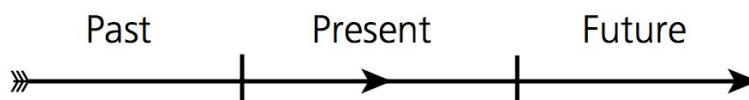
Tools & Best Practices

When it comes to productivity, each individual must find the tools — and cultivate the practices — that bring optimal results for his/her working style.

Experimenting with tools (new apps, better technology, etc.) is the easy part — often providing the positive reinforcement of immediate productivity gains. If major, long-term productivity gains are what you're seeking, however, those improvements cannot be achieved through tools and technologies alone. These more dramatic results come from adopting best practices for managing your work — and cultivating a system customized for your particular needs.

Getting Things Done

The "godfather" of the productivity movement is David Allen, whose book "Getting Things Done" was proclaimed "the defining self-help business book of its time" by TIME Magazine. That book spawned Allen's GTD brand – and GTD practices that are enthusiastically embraced by productivity seekers around the world.

GTD is both a mindset (a productivity-oriented way of thinking about your work) and a potent system for managing commitments, information and communication. When practiced conscientiously, GTD results in a "trusted system" that captures and prioritizes all projects and tasks. GTD frees one's mind to focus on what's most important – and to avoid those disruptive crises when something big "slips through the cracks." "Getting Things Done" is required reading for anyone serious about productivity.

Productivity Metrics

In order to make continued improvements in productivity, it's important to track results in a systematic way. The data portion of this monitoring system is relatively easy, especially if you're in a firm (where time sheets and billable hours are the "coin of the realm.") If you're in a corporate legal department, you may need to set up your own calendar system for tracking time and accomplishments.

This hours-tracking data is useful for showing patterns (and, perhaps, providing motivation). But it's the ongoing, anecdotal information you provide that best can facilitate a change in your consciousness — which is a necessary precursor to transforming behavior. Carry a Moleskine notebook — or try one of the terrific journaling apps such as DayOne. Then make a practice of capturing a note at the end of each day, summarizing your accomplishments and noting patterns — both good and bad — that can serve as compass and course-correction as you continue to refine your productivity practices.

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