

Lawyers Lives In Balance

Developing Your Plan And Tips For Staying Energized & Productive

By John W. Olmstead, MBA, Ph.D, CMC

I am often asked to help law firms design and implement strategic business plans. I also coach many solo and small firm attorneys in career as well as personal and professional life balance issues. In both situations - the starting point is the same - begin by taking inventory of your personal life goals. Only then can you effectively begin planning an effective career strategy or law practice. Unfortunately, many attorneys start with the law practice and take care of business first and fail to take care of their personal lives until it is too late. It is much easier to begin your life and career with balance that it is to try to bring your life back into balance later in life.

Everyone faces the issue of time management at one point or another. Attorneys work on client matters, firm projects, fight long commutes, manage households, attend school or other training, raise children, respond to increasing work and time pressures of the shrinking workplace, and often deal with aging parents. The days often seem to last long into the night and vacation and leisure time seem to be consumed with issues other than relaxation and personal fulfillment.

In fact, a recent study of more than 50,000 employees from a variety of

manufacturing and service organizations found that two out of every five employees are dissatisfied with the balance between their work and their personal lives. The lack of balance "is due to long work hours, changing demographics, more time in the car, the deterioration of boundaries between work and home, and increased work pressure," says the study's author, Bruce Katcher, president of the Discovery Group, a management consulting firm.

Recent ABA surveys and studies demonstrate similar findings. Attorneys are becoming more and more frustrated by:

- § Not enough time to enjoy family and life
- § Working harder and making less
- § Missing out on life and family
- § No time to pursue and develop personal and professional interests
- § Not spending quality time with spouse and children

Our clients are also telling us that personal and professional life balance is their greatest challenge. Time is becoming more important to people than money.

Attorneys are experiencing dependency and other problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, depression, divorce, and suicide.

In most settings, the pace and competitiveness of legal practice have rapidly accelerated. Technological innovation has heightened demands for instant accessibility, and profit-related concerns have pushed billable hours to unprecedented levels. The result, as experts note, is a "culture clash" between personal and professional commitments. Lawyers remain perpetually on call - connected to the workplace through cell phones, emails, faxes, and beepers. According to ABA studies almost half of surveyed lawyers feel that they do not have enough time for themselves or their families. Almost three-quarters of lawyers with children report difficulty balancing professional and personal demands. The number of women who doubt the possibility of successfully combining work and family has almost tripled over the past two decades. Only a fifth of surveyed lawyers are very satisfied with the allocation of time between work and personal needs. A desire for more time to meet personal and family needs is one of the major reasons lawyers consider changing jobs, and it is a more important consideration for women than for men.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you find yourself spending more and more time on client and firm work-related projects?
2. Do you often feel that you don't have any time for yourself - or your family and friends?
3. Does it seem that every minute of every day is always scheduled for something?
4. Do you sometimes feel as though you've lost sight of who you are and why you chose law as a career?
5. Can you remember the last time you were able to find the time to take a day off to do something fun - something just for yourself?
6. Do you feel stressed out most of the time?
7. Can you remember the last time you used all your allotted vacation and personal days?
8. Does it sometimes feel as though you have never even have a chance to catch your breath before you have to move on to the next client project/crisis?
9. Can you remember the last time you read -- and finished -- a book that you were reading purely for pleasure?
10. Do you wish you had more time for some outside interests and hobbies, but simply don't?
11. Do you often feel exhausted -- even early in the week?
12. Can you remember the last time you went to the movies or visited a

museum or attended some other cultural event?

13. Do you do what you do because so many people (children, partners, parents) depend on you for support?
14. Have you missed many of your family's important events because of work-related time pressures and responsibilities?
15. Do you almost always bring work home with you?

If you answered with non-positive responses to more than five questions your life is out of balance and you need to take steps to correct the situation.

Create A Personal/Professional Life Plan

Establishing personal and professional priorities and making correct choices is crucial. You must begin by determining what's important in life - make a list of what's truly important in your life, establish boundaries and priorities, and formulate a plan. Typical elements that should be on your list include:

- § Physical Health
- § Spiritual
- § Nutrition
- § Stress Management
- § Family
- § Friends
- § Financial
- § Professional Relationships
- § Efficiency at Work
- § Professional Development
- § Hobbies and Outside Interests
- § Your Work Life

Once you have developed your list - you are ready to formulate your plan. Your plan should include your time investment that you plan on making

in each of the above areas as well as specific activities (action items) and timelines. Once you have formulated your personal plan you are ready to develop the business plan for your practice.

A successful life and practice requires:

- § Focus
- § Balance
- § Roadmap (Plans)

Keys To Happiness

- § You must take responsibility for your personal happiness, set clear goals, develop skills, become sensitive to feedback, know how to concentrate, and get involved.
- § You must have an overall context within which to live.

Tips For Staying Energized And Productive

TIP #1: Develop a Personal Life Plan and a Career/Practice Business Plan.

TIP #2: Use and work your plan.

TIP #3: Work smarter - not harder. Improve your time management skills.

TIP #4: Create your life balance expectations for you clients and your superiors in the firm. When interviewing for a new job or position let your future employer know your expectations - upfront.

TIP #5: Tend to your physical health. Insure that you address prevention and treatment of diseases, weight control, physical fitness and stress management. Schedule and keep annual physicals.

Exercise daily.

TIP #6: Begin looking for ways to implement alternative billing. Look for alternatives to billable hours.

TIP #7: Take time for yourself and family. Take vacations.

TIP #8: Define what is important to you and define your personal-professional life balance boundaries.

TIP #9: Enjoy life and get involved in activities other than the practice of law. Pursue hobbies and other interests.

TIP #10: Know your personal and professional goals.

TIP #11: Learn to relax. Take time everyday for meditation, prayer, yoga or some other activity that is focused solely on relaxation.

TIP #12: Schedule time for relationship building and maintenance.

TIP #13: Never eat alone. Use mealtime to network with referral sources, potential clients, and other professionals.

TIP #14: Turn off e-mail notifications, pagers, and cell phones.

TIP #15: Develop a personal and business budget and follow it.

TIP #16: Network, Network, Network - both inside and outside of the firm.

TIP #17: Develop your conversational skills.

TIP #18: Eliminate clutter at home and at work. Develop a filing system for your personal papers and business files and documents. Open and review your mail immediately and discard anything that you do not intend to keep.

TIP #19: Use technology to streamline your work.

TIP #20: Delegate work.

Good luck on your journey.

John W. Olmstead, Jr., MBA, Ph.D., CMC, is a Certified Management Consultant and the president of Olmstead & Associates, Legal Management Consultants, based in St. Louis, Missouri. The firm provides practice management, marketing, and technology consulting services to law and other professional service firms to help change and reinvent their practices. The firm helps law firms implement client service improvement programs consisting of client satisfaction surveys, program development, and training and coaching programs. Their coaching program provides attorneys and staff with one-on-one coaching to help them get "unstuck" and move forward, reinventing both themselves and their law practices. Founded in 1984, Olmstead & Associates serves clients across the United States ranging in size from 100 professionals to firms with solo practitioners. Dr. Olmstead is the Editor-in-Chief of "The Lawyers Competitive Edge: The Journal of Law Office Economics and Management," published by West Group. He also serves as a member of the Legal Marketing Association (LMA) Research Committee. Dr. Olmstead may be contacted via e-mail at: jolmstead@olmsteadassoc.com. Additional articles and information is available at the firm's web site: www.olmsteadassoc.com

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Helping Lawyers Change & Reinvent Their Practices

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