

Making Every Six Minutes Count

CATRIN MILLS



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Foreword

IT'S NOT a coincidence that I'm writing a book about time management at possibly the busiest time in my entire life.

In the last four years I've built a division in a law firm, got married, moved house, had two children, re-trained as a coach and started my own business. When I was asked to write a book about time management, I didn't fail to see the irony – my first thought was how am I going to find the time to do that?

But that's precisely the point.

There is a perception that anyone who professes to know about time management must lead a serene existence and have plenty of spare time to do nothing. This is possibly why lawyers find the whole topic alien. For many, it has the image of a 'touchy feely' subject which boils down to applying a bit of common sense. Such subjects do not sit comfortably with busy legal professionals.

But time management is not about doing less. It's not even about being more organised (although personal organisation enables you to manage your time well). It's being selective about what you do and enabling you to do more of what is of value to you – things which make you fulfilled, successful and happy. In essence, it's about enabling you to achieve your ambitions and realise your goals.

The other great irony about this report is that you will need it most at times when you feel the last thing you have time to do is read it. A comment I often come across is, 'Surely spending time learning about time management is, in itself, a waste of time?'

It was relatively late in my legal career that I began to read about time management and I had those very same thoughts. I was sceptical about how much time management literature could teach lawyers, who are trained to be incisive and analytical. 'Surely', I thought, 'Managing your time is all about being sensible, making a list and then getting your head down?' A degree of stress is positively cultivated in the legal profession, and deadlines and late

nights are considered the norm, so I wasn't sure that time management held any answers for the state of the legal profession. But, as soon as I started to read, I discovered keys and techniques which had taken me over 10 years to work out.

There are many lawyers who struggle with heavy workloads, competing demands and conflicting pressures, but as they have no idea how to tackle these issues, their situation inevitably becomes worse. They end up more stressed and less productive.

Time management is not all obvious but much of it is simple to master. Simply adopting a few easy practices can free up valuable time. This makes you instantly less stressed and more successful – not just in your work, but in all areas of your life.

There is over 30 years worth of literature on the concept of time management applying to the business world generally. Law is a world unto itself. As a lawyer, you don't have the time to trawl through books written for other sectors which don't understand the specific demands and requirements of the legal profession. In writing this report, I have taken into consideration the day-to-day challenges facing lawyers when applying the time management techniques, so that you can make better use of your time – the key to being a happier and more successful legal practitioner.

Executive summary

TIME IS a lawyer's commodity – or rather – it is how most lawyers quantify their expertise. How successful you are as a lawyer depends fundamentally on how you use your time. There is a direct correlation between how much value you can extract from your time and your profitability. Most lawyers must record how they spend their time on a daily basis and regularly justify their use of time to clients, the court or their employers.

Since time is a concept at the heart of the legal profession, why is it that very few lawyers seriously think about time management? Little formal training is available to lawyers on time management, and few lawyers really think about or plan how they allocate their time, let alone analyse what they get out of it. Many lawyers assume that time management is something they already grasp – that it is something they do intrinsically – and so they assume that there is really nothing to learn.

Making Every Six Minutes Count explains why lawyers should look more objectively at how they spend their time, and how principles of time management can make an enormous difference in a profession which is now at its most stressful and intensive. The more efficiently and effectively you use your time, the more successful your practice will be. But this report is more than about ensuring profitability for your practice – although this is a direct consequence of effective time management – it's about bringing you success in the rest of your life, too. Good time management means taking control of your time and achieving professional success whilst restoring work-life balance. This report guides lawyers in how to make the most of their time both professionally and personally.

Chapter 1 defines time management and its relevancy to lawyers. We deduce that, technically, there is no such thing as time management – what we're really talking about is self management. It is not possible to move, change or extend time. Time is a constant. This chapter explains how mastering time management really means being able to manage your own

activities and actions better. It challenges the perception amongst lawyers that time management, as one of the so-called softer skills, is something they don't need training in, but learning about time management is a small investment for a big return.

Before you can address your working habits and behaviours, it is helpful to straighten out your working area so as to make it conducive to effective time management. Chapter 2 addresses lawyers' obsession with hard copies and provides practical advice on how to eliminate unnecessary paperwork, how to organise diaries, to-do lists, schedules and contacts, and how to streamline your office to allow you to see things more clearly.

Chapter 3 highlights the importance of planning. Lawyers are taught how to plan cases, yet they typically spend very little time planning their working hours. In this chapter, we look at how a small amount of planning can mean an effective working strategy. We look at the difference between time management and time leadership, and how planning your time also involves keeping an eye on the bigger picture.

Chapter 4 turns to the art of prioritising. It includes basic tools to help you prioritise your tasks. We also examine how to use prioritisation to deal with overwhelm and the feeling of dread when faced with too much to do. The concept of the 'to-day' list is also introduced here.

Delegation is the single, most effective way to instantly win more time. Chapter 5 examines the skills needed to delegate effectively.

Chapter 6 addresses the issue of procrastination – a principal reason why lawyers lose much time during the working day. It provides some practical tips on how to overcome procrastination and recognise the black holes into which time easily disappears.

We now live in a society where we are constantly reachable. But this also means we are constantly interruptible. Chapter 7 examines how to deal with communications and interruptions. It provides advice on dealing with common distractions such as e-mail, the internet, the phone and even, personal interruptions from friends and colleagues.

Chapter 8 takes the concept of time and self management further by discussing how to be proactive instead of reactive. We discuss how to set boundaries for yourself and how to say 'no'. This chapter also introduces the concept of work-life balance and explains why it is elusive for lawyers.

Managing time effectively means managing clients effectively. Chapter 9 examines how ineffective client management leads to significant amounts of wasted time, impacting negatively on the level of service provided. It also contains advice on managing clients more proactively to provide an ideal service.

Chapter 10 examines the difficulty faced by many lawyers in finding time for business development. This chapter offers useful advice on how to fit in marketing and networking, and how to identify the 'quick wins' and get the most marketing mileage for the least amount of time.

With rising numbers of lawyers seeking help for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, stress and ultimately breakdown, Chapter 11 analyses how stress has affected the legal profession and the importance of protecting lawyers' mental wellbeing.

Chapter 12 focuses on how you can use time management to attain professional and personal success and fulfilment. Developing the theme of personal development and career planning in previous chapters, this chapter explains how you can closely align time management with your lifelong goals. While good time management will bring you success and organisation on a day-to-day level, as the days add up to weeks, months and years, how can you ensure that your investment is bringing you closer to achieving your ambitions?

Finally, Chapter 13 provides real-life accounts of the time management challenges faced by lawyers, from trainees to managing partners. A broad range of lawyers have been interviewed to show that time management is an issue common to all in the profession. But some lawyers who have mastered time management are using it to their advantage, and their accounts reveal how.

About the author

CATRIN MILLS studied English and Related Literature at York University before taking the CPE and LPC at the College of Law, York and London, respectively.

Catrin trained at City firm Reynolds Porter Chamberlain and spent five years there as an employment lawyer, representing employers and employees alike. Catrin moved to McKeowns in St Albans in 2005 where she set up an employment department. Catrin grew her team to 10 lawyers in three years whilst running her own caseload of high-profile employment matters. Catrin specialised in representing lawyers and other professionals in employment disputes.

Catrin now provides individual coaching to lawyers (The Lawyer Coach) and writes a popular blog providing time and stress management tips for the legal profession, and regularly speaks on topics such as the challenges facing working mothers.

For more information on The Lawyer Coach and to read Catrin's blog, visit: <http://thelawyercoach.wordpress.com>