



THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS "TIME MANAGEMENT"

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The following is an excerpt from *50 Lessons for Lawyers: Earn More—Stress Less—Be Awesome* by Nora Riva Bergman. The book offers 50 lessons focused on productivity, marketing, and leadership in bite-sized, easily digestible lessons. Each lesson also includes suggestions on how you can start living each lesson right now. Read individually or as a whole, each lesson provides the tools and motivation you need to develop new routines that will improve your life and practice one step at a time. The excerpt has been edited for style and clarity.

TANSTATM! There Ain't No Such Thing as Time Management

"It's not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"—Henry David Thoreau

We use the phrase "time management" because we've been conditioned to do so over the years. But there really is no such thing as time management. Once you understand that you cannot manage time—you can only manage yourself—you'll begin to think differently about time. And when you begin to think differently about time, you'll begin to act differently. And until you begin to act differently, you'll never be able to take control of your calendar or your life.

It has always been a badge of honor for lawyers to work ridiculously long hours. The law firm culture says work late, every night, no matter what you are working on. Oh, and come in on weekends, too. This is a recipe for stress and burnout. Moreover, research shows that those long hours may be jeopardizing your health.

A study from Health.com and reported by CNN found that "people who work more than 10 hours a day are about 60 percent more likely to develop heart disease or have a heart attack than people

who clock just seven hours a day." According to Marianna Virtanen, M.D., doctors "should include working long hours in their list of potential risk factors" for heart disease. And Peter Kaufmann, Ph.D., says that people who are driven and impatient at work "may be equally driven and impatient with ... family and friends."

As Tony Schwartz, author and founder of The Energy Project, notes in an article he wrote for *Harvard Business Review*:

Just as you'll eventually go broke if you make constant withdrawals from your bank account without offsetting deposits, you will also ultimately burn yourself out if you spend too much energy too continuously at work without sufficient renewal... When you're running as fast as you can, what you sacrifice is attention to detail, and time to step back, reflect on the big picture, and truly think strategically and long term.¹

A Bit of History

In 1954, Julian B. Rotter created the theory of "locus of control." In a nutshell, the locus of control theory states that, as individuals, we either have an internal or external locus of control. Those who have an external locus of control tend to see themselves as having no ability to control their own lives. They are buffeted by the four winds and drift wherever those winds take them. Their lives are incredibly stressful because they believe they have little control over what happens to them. Conversely, individuals with an internal locus of control believe they can control their lives and their destinies.

Here's a simple way to think about the relationship between stress and control: The level of stress we feel is inversely proportionate to the level of control we feel we have over our lives. Less control; more stress. More control; less stress.

Fortunately, there are things you can do to increase your internal locus of control. Though it may sound like a paradox, you can increase your internal locus of control by exercising more control over your life.

Adrenaline Addiction

While research has proven that the more control we have over our lives the less stress we feel, the truth is, many attorneys like stress—and lots of it. Have you ever said to yourself, "I work best under pressure,"

or “I’m really deadline driven”? Can you go for more than five minutes without checking your phone? Do you find yourself checking your email in the middle of the night? Do you run from meeting to meeting with no time in between? Do you feel as though you always “overpromise” and “underdeliver”? Do you always feel overwhelmed? Are you usually running late? Do you arrive at the office already feeling rushed?

These are just a few of the telltale signs of adrenaline addiction. And many lawyers suffer from it. Adrenaline is the most potent stimulant created by our sympathetic nervous system. It’s created in response to stress and increases heart rate, pulse rate, and blood pressure. It also raises the blood levels of glucose and lipids, in addition to having other metabolic effects on us. We are not built to have adrenaline coursing through our veins all or most of the time. Unfortunately, that’s exactly what happens to adrenaline addicts.

In his article, “The Painful Reality of Adrenaline Addiction,” Patrick Lencioni, explains:

There is something particularly insidious about adrenaline addiction that makes it hard for many leaders to kick the habit. Unlike other addicts whose behaviors are socially frowned-upon, adrenaline addicts are often praised for their frantic activity, even promoted for it during their careers. And so they often wear their problem like a badge of honor, failing to see it as an addiction at all in spite of the pain it causes. When confronted about their problem, adrenaline addicts (I’m a recovering one myself) will tell you about their endless list of responsibilities and all the people who need their attention. And while they’ll often complain about their situation, they’ll quickly brush off any constructive advice from spouses, friends, or co-workers who “just don’t understand.”²

The legal profession has a long history of encouraging adrenaline addiction. How many lawyers have you heard brag about the long hours they work? Maybe you’re one of them. If you are, then it’s time to make some changes. The first step is to change your thinking. Refuse to accept the myths that say, “There just aren’t enough hours in the day,” or “I have no control over my time.” There really is enough time, and you *can* take control.

“Don’t say you don’t have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Theresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein.”—H. Jackson Browne

As a lawyer, you are a member of one of the most important pro-

fessions on the planet. You may not think about it often, but lawyers are life-changers. The work lawyers do transforms people’s lives. Forget the lawyer jokes; the work you do makes a difference for your clients, your community and our world. But it’s your responsibility to manage yourself around the time you have. As a lawyer, you’ve been given the opportunity to make a difference. Don’t gripe about not having enough time to get it all done. Instead, make a conscious choice to say “no” to those things that are not important. If you know your mission and strive to live it, you’ll become much better at saying “no” to the unimportant things. Give your very best time and talents to those things you are passionate about.

Living the Lesson

Change your “time management” mindset. Think in terms of “self-management.”

Increase your locus of control by taking more control of your calendar. Identify those things that you need to do each day or each week and schedule the time in your calendar. For example, if you want to meet with your key people each day, schedule those meetings in your calendar and treat them just as you would treat an appointment with a client.

If you find that you are always working late, make a commitment to leave the office by 5:30 p.m. at least two days a week. Your loved ones want to see you. ☺



Nora Riva Bergman is a law firm coach and author. She is the founder of Real Life Practice and an Atticus Certified Practice Advisor. As a licensed attorney since 1992, Bergman brings a deep understanding of the practice and business of law to her work with lawyers, law firms, and bar associations across the country. She has practiced as an employment law attorney and certified mediator and has served as an adjunct professor at both Stetson

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Endnotes

¹Tony Schwartz, *The Productivity Myth*, HARV. BUS. REV. (May 5, 2010), <https://hbr.org/2010/05/the-productivity-myth-2>.

²Patrick Lencioni, *The Painful Reality of Adrenaline Addiction*, HUB (Sept. 2004), <http://www.tablegroup.com/blog/the-painful-reality-of-adrenaline-addiction>.

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