

## **Deadlines and Commitments: Learn to Manage Your Time**

*By Linda Morkan*

You will not survive in the practice of law if you do not learn how to manage your time. For a lawyer, efficient time management skills are as essential as oxygen. Lacking either, you will soon be reduced to a pathetic figure, crumpled on the floor, gasping and begging for help (or air).

So the challenge for you is to master the ability to: (1) gauge how many hours you have at your disposal; (2) estimate how long it will take you to perform the tasks asked of you; and (3) subtract (2) from (1). (If you arrive at a negative number, you might need to recalculate). This simple calculation will be done hundreds of thousands of times during your career. For some, it gets easier with each performance; some never get the hang of it and are dogged relentlessly by looming deadlines. Sort of like living under a legal sword of Damocles.

It is best to neither overestimate (1) nor underestimate (2). The reality is this: there are only 24 hours in a day. Always. Sometimes you will wish you could eke out an extra hour or two, but you will never be able to do it. And, if that reality is not hard enough, accept, too, that not all 24 of those hours are available for work. You must sleep (eventually), you must eat, you must interact with other human beings. If you envision keeping your spouse or significant other, the latter cannot be ignored.

Things almost always take longer than you think they will, especially if you are relatively new at the trade. So pad your estimate a little. Yes, it is great to be seen as the whiz kid, turning around quality product overnight, but the key word there is "quality." It never makes sense to turn in inferior work quicker.

Now you might have asked yourself, "Why does she care how I allocate my time?" I'll tell you why: other people (like me) rely on the promises you make. It's all about deadlines and commitments.

When you say that you will turn in a draft on Monday, I actually plan on receiving it Monday and have probably set aside Monday night or Tuesday to work on your draft. I consult my calendar and the deadline and calculate when I should review and revise the draft and return it to you for further edits. When you deliver it on Tuesday instead, I not only have "unused" time I allocated on Monday, but I likely scheduled Wednesday for something else. Now, my schedule is in upheaval and we may be looking at a time crunch.

There will always be periodic disasters and crises. But, generally, learn how to estimate your time and workload and make your best guess as to when you are going to do the work. If something unexpected intervenes, recalculate your estimate and report back. Do not become one who routinely promises what he cannot (or does not) deliver.