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Learn How to Manage Your Time and Develop Your Business

Time Management for Attorneys: A Lawyer's Guide to Decreasing Stress, Eliminating Interruptions & Getting Home on Time

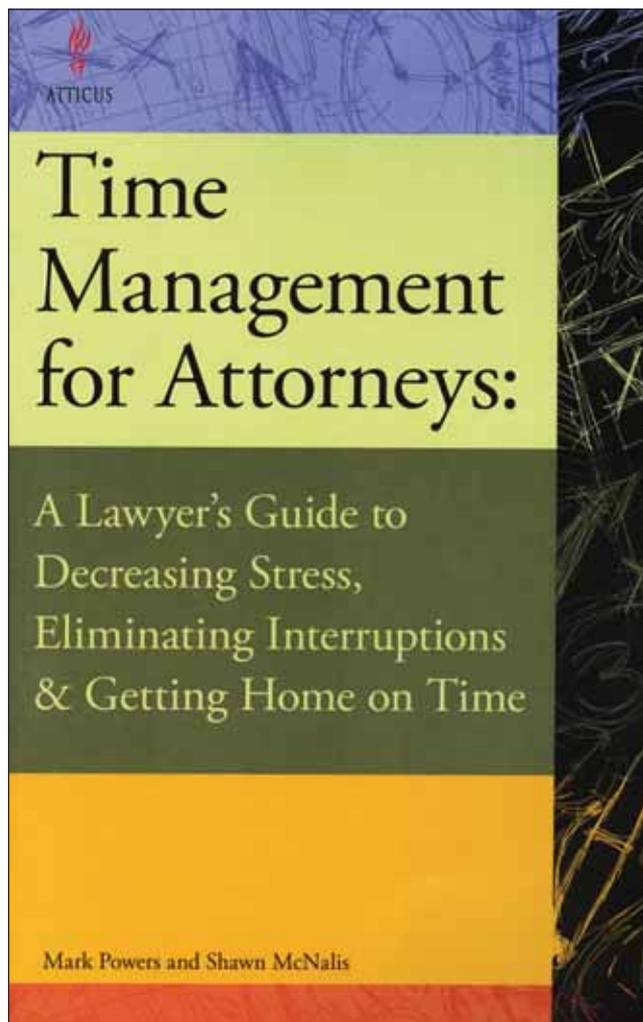
by Mark Powers and Shawn McNalis
Atticus, 137 pages

reviewed by Lynn Gavin

There is a plethora of books dealing with time management and stress management in the marketplace today. In contrast to those typical time and stress-management books, *Time Management for Attorneys: A Lawyer's Guide to Decreasing Stress, Eliminating Interruptions & Getting Home on Time*, is unique because it (1) is written specifically for attorneys, (2) provides interactive exercises designed to address how you want to live both inside and outside the office; and (3) contains a current and realistic view of the practice of law.

The authors, Mark Powers and Shawn McNalis, are associated with Atticus, a legal consulting business founded in 1989 to teach attorneys how to obtain business. In describing why they wrote the book, the authors say:

Although our clients enthusiastically embraced our ideas on client development, they would repeatedly complain that they did not have time to implement the strategies and techniques provided in our semi-



nars and coaching sessions. . . . [W]e discovered that many attorneys have no time for client development because they don't know how to *make* the time. . . . Not only did they not have any education in how to manage their time in the practice of law, they believed the task to be next to impossible. . . . We realize that no one can ever control 100 percent of their time, but a good 75 to 80 percent of your time

can be more predictable if you implement the time management tools and strategies provided in this book. . . . A law practice and a personal life don't have to be mutually exclusive.

At first glance, this book appears to be a relatively short read at 137 pages. Taking that approach, however, would defeat the entire purpose of this book. The authors have included in each chapter of the book specific written exercises that are designed to help the reader learn to manage his or her time more effectively. In addition, sample forms designed to increase both personal and office efficiency are included throughout the book. Both the exercises and the forms are provided not only in the book, but also on a separate CD-ROM accompanying the book so that the reader may conveniently access them via computer.

The book's introduction sets forth the premise that attorneys seem to have two basic approaches to time management: reactive and proactive. Reactive is believing that you cannot control your life and feeling at the mercy of circumstances. In contrast, proactive is believing that you are the designer of your circumstances rather than a victim of your circumstances. The reader is provided with two checklists, containing typical behaviors of each approach, and is asked to identify those that apply to his or her practice.

The reactive checklist includes the following:

- Operating with a survival mentality;
- Not marketing your practice with any consistency;
- Constantly handling client crises;
- Generating income but not producing a real profit;
- Delegating very little;
- Feeling burned-out; and
- Considering getting out of your area of law altogether.

The proactive checklist includes the following:

- Working toward a long-term vision of your practice;
- Always marketing referral sources to cultivate future business;
- Creating a "crises-free" zone in your firm by systemizing and exercising preventive measures;
- Producing profit and building a strong financial foundation;
- Building your reputation by working with desirable clients;
- Delegating to others for maximum efficiency and profitability; and
- Experiencing satisfaction with your practice and feeling that it supports your personal life.

Following the introduction, there are nine chapters, each of which addresses a different proactive strategy in detail. Those nine proactive strategies are: (1) creating a personal vision statement, (2) creating a professional vision statement, (3) setting strategic goals, (4) selecting clients wisely, (5) scheduling like tasks together, (6) systemizing your office, (7) managing interruptions, (8) practicing delegation and (9) taking a vacation. Within each of those nine chapters, the authors provide written exercises for the reader to complete. The exercises are designed to help the reader create a plan for getting the time needed to improve his or her legal practice and life. They are simple and straightforward, but do require the reader to give some serious thought to these topics. Most important, each of the chapters provides detailed examples of exactly how to put those nine specific strategies into practice in professional and personal life. Also included are examples of how other attorneys have done so. The authors do a good job of walking you through their specific techniques to help you meet your goals.

Below are key excerpts from each of the nine chapters to give you a flavor of the book.

Chapter 1 – Proactive Strategy One: Create a Personal Vision Statement

It is up to you to write the script, assemble the plot and decide on the main characters. Once you have done that, your job is to "live into it." If this seems laborious, realize that you are now living your life without a plan. You could compare that to going on a vacation without a plan, which you probably would not even consider.

Chapter 2 – Proactive Strategy Two: Create a Professional Vision Statement

What matters most in your practice? Delivering high quality work, working with clients you like, being profitable, having a systemized practice, achieving proper life/work balance, employing a great legal team/staff, creating a professional legacy?

Chapter 3 – Proactive Strategy Three: Set Strategic Goals

Lawyers report that breaking their larger goals into smaller steps is psychologically reassuring. All of a sudden, a large vision is reduced to achievable tasks. You are setting yourself up for small wins. A life well lived is composed of many small wins in service to the larger goal.

Chapter 4 – Proactive Strategy Four: Select Clients Wisely

The quality of your practice is determined largely by the quality of your clients. Carefully selecting your clients not only helps protect you against malpractice accusations, it also has the added benefit of saving you precious time, improving office morale, minimizing collection problems and restoring peace in an otherwise crisis-driven practice.

Chapter 5 – Proactive Strategy Five: Schedule Like Tasks Together

When your brain is allowed to focus on similar tasks, you can accomplish results four times faster

than when you are continually switching the types of tasks or are constantly interrupted.

Chapter 6 – Proactive Strategy Six: Systemize Your Office

Do what you can to eliminate crises that arise internally. Issues such as poor office protocol, a lack of written office procedures and piles of files increase the chance of something falling through the cracks and creating a problem.

Chapter 7 – Proactive Strategy Seven: Manage Interruptions

Industrial engineers have determined that the average length of an interruption is seven minutes, and it takes about three minutes to get back into what you were doing when you were interrupted. This adds up to 10 minutes per interruption. It is not uncommon to hear attorneys say that they view Saturday and even Sundays as a real haven—not for rest and relaxation, but to concentrate and get work done. When they analyze this statement, they realize that it is primarily because there are no interruptions to deal with. What they have gained in time spent on production, however, is a huge loss in the personal column of life, interacting with family as well as taking care of themselves.

Chapter 8 – Proactive Strategy Eight: Practice Delegation

To make the same amount of money or more, yet work fewer hours and have a personal life, you must be able to delegate. The attorney who tries to do it all and minimizes the involvement of other staff members becomes quickly burned out and reduces his or her option to have time away from the practice.

Chapter 9 – Proactive Strategy Nine: Take a Vacation

Planning and taking a vacation is the best way to test whether your office is fully systemized, your team is trained and your practice is capable of running without you.

There may never be a convenient time to take a vacation. The authors are convinced, however, that with enough advance planning, you can make it work. Time off may actually benefit your practice. When you leave your environment for a week or two and allow yourself to stop thinking about the technical aspects of your practice (which may not happen until the second week), new and more creative ideas will occur to you.

As a criticism, I wish the authors would have included a wider variety of practice areas and law firm sizes in the examples used throughout the book. By doing so, they could have increased the book's appeal to a wider group of attorneys. Although there is no such indication in the title, the book is more specifically directed toward a litigation practice and a small firm or solo practice. For those who practice in such settings, the illustrations used by the authors will hit home. In contrast, those attorneys who have a transactional practice or practice in a larger law firm will find it a bit harder to identify with the examples set forth by the authors. Despite this criticism, the book does contain universal principles applicable to all practicing attorneys.

In conclusion, this book offers a unique perspective for lawyers with respect to time management, stress management and balancing a professional/personal life. I highly recommend this book for those who are serious about such matters. So, my fellow attorney colleagues, I do hope you can find the time to read it!



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matters. Gavin received her B.S. and M.S. degrees from Purdue University and her J.D. degree from Georgia State University.

Raising the Bar: Legendary Rainmakers Share Their Business Development Secrets

by Robin M. Hensley
Schroder Media, LLC, 130 pages

reviewed by John T. Marshall

Raising the Bar is a book of fire-side chats, conducted by author Robin M. Hensley, with 10 “icons” of the State Bar of Georgia whom I, along with so many other lawyers, have known and respected for many years. The featured lawyers in the book and accompanying DVD are: Miles J. Alexander, Emmet J. Bondurant, Bobby Lee Cook, Clay C. Long, Frank Love Jr., Carl E. Sanders, Richard H. Sinkfield, Chilton D. Varner, Paul Webb Jr. and the late Judge Griffin B. Bell. The DVD inside the back cover of the book contains excerpts of her interviews with each of these lawyers.

The book is informative, as well as entertaining, because it gives us an inside look at the professional lives of these lawyers. Hensley has done an excellent job interviewing these lawyers and encouraging them to converse candidly about their careers. The book is a valuable collection of their reminiscences and professional philosophies. There are lessons here in client development and lawyer-client relationships that are timeless.

Moreover, this book will be especially valuable for young lawyers who will learn from the masters about achieving professional and business success in the practice of law. There's a certain ethic—a determination and a love of the law—that has kept these lawyers going over the decades. The profession calls out for young lawyers who feel that same kind of calling today.

Some prospective readers may say, “Some of these lawyers started practicing law a long time ago. Times have changed! The world is different now.” And that is all true.