

Practicing Well: Slow Down and Take a Break!

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Lawyers and legal professionals are notorious for working many consecutive hours each day without taking adequate breaks. Many of us spend our days multi-tasking and juggling ten things at once because we believe it saves time and is more efficient than doing things one at a time. For example, we often review and send emails while participating in conference calls, answer the phone while deep in thought over another matter, and review emails/texts during meetings. The problem is that studies have shown that multi-tasking actually slows productivity, increases risks of error and brain fatigue, and causes incredible amounts of stress. Likewise, sitting and working for several consecutive hours has health risks akin to obesity and smoking. But, the practice of law is not getting any less demanding, so what do we do? Ironically, experts say that we need to slow down and take more breaks.

Say what? Won't that interrupt momentum on projects and require more hours at the office? In some cases, perhaps; however, studies have shown that giving your full attention to the task at hand allows you to work faster/more efficiently because your concentration levels are at their peak, decreases stress because you accomplish more in a shorter amount of time, and decreases the chances of making mistakes that require additional time to address (i.e., sending emails to clients without proper attachments, or asking someone to repeat themselves because you were not paying full attention). Some experts suggest pausing and counting to three before switching tasks, for example, when the phone rings. This brief pause allows you to clear your mind of the previous task and ready it for new information.

Taking short three to five-minute breaks every 30-45 minutes will also help combat the sedentary nature of a lawyer's work and its associated health risks (plus a quick lap around the office burns calories, which is especially important on days where we can't make it to the gym). Try slowing down and taking more breaks for one week and track your productivity and stress levels—you will likely be surprised at what you find!

Pro Tips: 1) set reminders on your phone to take breaks throughout the day; 2) place a calming object (like a picture of friends/family/scenery) next to your phone and look at that before answering calls/switching tasks; 3) schedule specific times throughout the day to check email rather than continually checking throughout the day; and 4) reduce the urge to multi-task by limiting notifications from emails/texts (outlook allows you to eliminate audible, pop-up, and icon notifications for emails while still allowing you to review new emails when your email window is open).

About the Author

Patty Beck is a Claim Attorney with *Minnesota Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company* where she manages litigation involving legal malpractice claims, advises attorneys facing existing and potential ethical dilemmas, and resolves complex pre-suit malpractice claims on behalf of MLM insureds. She is Co-Chair of the MSBA's Life and The Law Committee and frequently speaks on topics related to ethics, legal malpractice, and attorney wellness.

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