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6 Keys to Your Success
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BY Nora Riva Bergman

You can do this.

It's not easy to replace bad habits with good ones. There will be times when your day will blow up and you'll feel discouraged. But know that if you stick with it, you'll create new habits that will propel you toward your goals.

These six keys work together and build upon each other to help you take control of your practice and your life. Begin now to turn these keys into habits that will work for you. And don't get discouraged! Know that if you stay focused, you can change your old way of work, increase your productivity, decrease your stress, and reclaim your life.

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“It's not enough to be busy. The ants are busy.
The question is: What are we busy about?”

- Henry David Thoreau





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. This is a recipe for stress and burn-out. Moreover, recent 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.”

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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 the Harvard Business Review online:

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.



“Every passing minute is another chance to turn it all around.”

- Cameron Crowe

TANSTATM

There Ain't No Such Thing as Time Management

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TANSTATM or “There ain’t no such thing as time management” is the key to all the other keys. We use the phrase “time management” because we’ve been conditioned to do so over the years. But there 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.

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A Bit of History

In 1954, Julian B. Rotter, created the concept 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 blow wherever those winds take them. Their lives are incredibly stressful, because they believe they have little control over what happens to them. By contrast, individuals with an internal locus of control believe they can control their lives and their destiny. 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. That is what these keys will help you do.

Here's a simple way to think of 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.

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Adrenaline addiction

While research has proven that the more control we have over our lives the less stress we feel, the truth is many (most?) 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 Blackberry? 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 “over-promise” and “under-deliver”? 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. We are not built to have adrenaline coursing through our veins 24/7. Unfortunately, that’s exactly what happens to adrenaline addicts.

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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."

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.

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Create New Habits

In order to begin to kick the adrenaline addiction and take control of your life, you need to create new habits. Up to 95% of our behavior is based on our habits. And if you're like most attorneys, your habits around time management are . . . well . . . not so good. The remaining five keys focus on new habits that will help you increase your productivity, decrease your stress, take better care of your clients and take back your life.

Einstein said that the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result. If you're reading this, you know it's time to start doing things differently. So, let's get started.

“To be prepared is half the victory.”
- Miguel de Cervantes

Get in the habit of planning.



One of the most powerful things to you can do to begin to take control is to get into the habit of planning. The power of planning comes not from flawlessly executing your plans. That may rarely happen! The power comes from the planning itself.

As German writer and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) said, “Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.” Planning is the means by which to identify the “things which matter most.” Without identifying “the things which matter most,” you will constantly be reacting to things that are important to others. You’ll always be putting out fires. Planning is a powerful, proactive key to your time management success.

2

Get in the habit of planning.

Here's another reason why planning is so essential to your success. In the book, *The Way We're Working Isn't Working*, Tony Schwartz talks about the concept of “predeciding.” The concept of predeciding is a powerful way to change behavior. For example, if you want to stop eating junky, sugar-filled snacks at work, keep an assortment of healthy snacks in your desk drawer. By doing so, you've helped your brain “predecide” what you're going snack on, lessening your need to rely on the finite amount of willpower each of us has. Planning is just another way of predeciding. Rather than constantly reacting to other people's priorities, planning allows you to decide – in advance – how you are going to spend your day.

Predeciding should help a person protect goal pursuit from tempting distractions, bad habits, or competing goals. . . .When you go into a day that's unplanned, then you're just faced with whatever hits you. If you have a plan, then you don't let the unplanned things get in your way.

The Way We're Working Isn't Working, by Tony Schwartz and Jean Gomes

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Get in the habit of planning.

Take 30 minutes to plan your week.

- Schedule a weekly appointment with yourself to do your weekly planning. I suggest a minimum of 30 minutes on Thursday or Friday to plan the coming week.
- Include your key support person in your planning session.
- During your planning session, look out into your calendar for the next month. Look for deadlines and due dates.
- Block time in your calendar during the coming week to actually “do your work.”

Take 10 minutes at the end of the day to plan the following day.

- Do this *before* your legal assistant or paralegal leaves for the day so that you can both be prepared for the next day.
- Review your calendar for the next day. Do you have everything you need for the day? Are the files you plan to work on in your office? Are you prepared for your hearing? Deposition? Meeting?
- Identify the one thing that you must accomplish tomorrow if everything else goes south!
- Make sure your key people are clear on their top priorities, as well.

“The journey of a thousand miles
begins with one small step.”
- Chinese Proverb

Chunk it down.



In order to gain the laser-like focus needed to be *both* effective *and* productive, start thinking of your time in chunks. Create a big chunk (60-90 minutes maximum) in the morning and, if you can, a big chunk in the afternoon. Use these big chunks – or Power Hours – to focus on your most important work for the day. Most of us are at our best at some point in the morning – even if it’s not first thing in the morning. Take time to notice when you’re at your best, and capitalize on your “best time of the day” to do your best work.

Put your Power Hours in your calendar, and make it a habit to stick to them. At the end of a Power Hour, take a break. Alternating between periods of highly-focused work and breaks will tremendously increase your productivity.

3

Chunk it down.

In addition to scheduling Power Hours, use smaller chunks of time to process emails, return phone calls, and work on other tasks. You will be amazed by how much you can accomplish in only ten or 15 minutes of highly focused, uninterrupted chunks of time.

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”
- Annie Dillard

Limit needless interruptions.



How often do you come to the office in the morning, work like crazy, and then as you're getting ready to leave for the day, think to yourself, "What did I do today?". If you have more days like this than you'd like to acknowledge, chances are you're dealing with too many needless interruptions. According to research in Winifred Gallagher's book, *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*, it can take the brain up to 20 minutes to recover from an interruption. So, if you're dealing with only six unnecessary interruptions during your day, you're losing up to two hours. Two hours – gone. Two hours you could be billing. Do that math over the course of a year! Two hours you could be spending with your loved ones or golfing or biking or on your boat. You get the idea. But there is something you can do about it. Learn to limit needless interruptions and limit the amount of multi-tasking you do.

4

Limit needless interruptions.

Research conducted by the University of London, found that workers who are distracted by email and phone calls (READ: multitaskers) can suffer a 10-point drop in IQ. That is more than twice the impact of smoking marijuana, according to researchers. Multitasking, or as Dave Crenshaw, author of *The Myth of Multitasking*, refers to it – “switchtasking” – only serves to shorten our attention spans and make us more susceptible to interruptions – both internal and external.

Interruptions and multitasking create a sort of self-induced ADD.

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Limit needless interruptions.

Our brains cannot multi-task. They can only focus on one thing at a time. And as we age, our ability to switch quickly from one task to another diminishes. Maybe you've experienced this first-hand by hitting accidentally hitting "Reply to all" in an email while talking on the phone processing emails at the same time.

- Turn off email alarms and notices.
- Shut your door.
- Create Power Hours for yourself.
- Use earplugs or listen to music *with headphones* to drown out distractions.

“Simplicity boils down to two steps:
Identify the essential. Eliminate
the rest.”

- Leo Babauta

Do it. Defer it. Delegate it. Ditch it.

A large, stylized green number 5 with a drop shadow, positioned on the left side of the page.

This key may seem to be the simplest of the six keys. But just because something is simple doesn't mean it is easy. In his book *Getting Things Done*, David Allen, talks about the importance of the three Ds: Do it, Defer it, or Delegate it.

To that list I would add: Ditch it. You can apply the four Ds to all of your tasks and everything in your inbox – both your physical inbox and your email inbox.

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Do it. Defer it. Delegate it. Ditch it.

Do it.

If something will take you less than two minutes to do, you should do it. Immediately.

Defer it.

If a task will take longer than two minutes to complete *and* you are the person that needs to do it, defer it until a later time and schedule time in your calendar to do it.

Delegate it.

If the task will take longer than two minutes, but someone else could do it, then delegate it.

Ditch it.

If a task doesn't fit into any of the three categories above. You do not have to do it! Ditch it.

“Take a rest; a field that has rested
gives a bountiful crop.”

- Ovid, 43 BC – 17 AD

Give yourself a break.



In a culture of – work late, every night, no matter what you are working on – the idea of taking breaks during the day may seem counterintuitive. But if you want to be at your most effective throughout the day, give yourself a break. In fact, give yourself a number of breaks. The importance of taking breaks throughout the day is documented in *The other 90% - How to Unlock Your Vast Untapped Potential for Leadership and Life*, by Robert K. Cooper. Cooper speaks to the importance of these breaks, or what he refers to as “strategic pauses,” as a means to boost energy and mental clarity.

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Give yourself a break.

Recent medical studies have underscored the importance of getting up from your desk and taking a break. According to a study in the March 2012 issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine* as reported by CBS news:

Researchers discovered that people who sat for 11 hours a day or more were 40 percent more likely to die - from any cause. The researchers also found the odds of dying were 15 percent higher for those who sit between eight to 11 hours a day compared to those who sit less than four hours a day.

Research from the American Institute for Cancer Research found that that too much sitting increases the risk for colon cancer and breast cancer. The same study stressed the importance of taking hourly breaks of one or two minutes. Those breaks can be something as simple as standing up and stretching or walking to the window.

6

Give yourself a break.

To get the most from a break:

Get up and move!

Every time you get up and move or stretch you get an energy boost and increased mental clarity.

Change your view.

Look out the window to give your eyes a break from staring at the computer screen.

Breathe.

Deepen and relax your breathing – if even for just a few breaths.

Sip ice water. The refreshing cold stimulates energy-production and raises alertness.

Add some inspiration.

Stop for a moment to look at a photo of your loved ones or recall a fond memory. Remind yourself of what matters most to you.

From *The Other 90% - How to Unlock Your Vast Untapped Potential for Leadership and Life*, by Robert K. Cooper.

You can do this.

About Nora Riva Bergman



Nora Bergman is a law firm business coach, founder of [Real Life Practice](#) and a certified Lean Six Sigma Sensei. She is also a certified Atticus Practice Advisor and is one of the founders of The Law Firm Revolution. She coaches lawyers across the country on all aspects of law firm management and leadership. A licensed attorney since 1992, Nora has practiced as an employment law attorney and certified mediator. She has served as a professor at both Stetson University College of Law and the University of South Florida, teaching courses in alternative dispute resolution and negotiation. In addition, Nora has been a speaker at conferences for the American Bar Association, the Federal Bar Association, the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, the National Association of Bar Executives, The Florida Bar and other national and regional legal organizations. She has also served for eight years as the Executive Director of a voluntary bar association with over 1,200 members. She is currently a member of the Thought Leader Team at Law Without Walls, an international program for law students founded by the University of Miami School of Law.




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