

LAW MARKETING, MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

How to Add 7 Extra Hours to Your Week

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How to Add 7 Extra Hours to Your Week

I'm a fiend for productivity advice. I'll bet you are too. I see a headline like "60 Productivity Hacks for the Successful Lawyer" and I click on it so hard I nearly crush my mouse. I love me some productivity advice.

Unfortunately, the advice usually doesn't work for me. It all sounds good, but when push comes to shove, it doesn't help me get more done. At the end of the week, I've still got piles of unfinished cases and projects. I need some hardcore advice. I don't need a bunch of random tips.

That's what I've put together for you. The serious advice. The stuff that makes a difference.

Rosen's Eight-Step Plan to Greater Productivity

Here's what works for me. This is the good stuff.

If you follow this advice—and I mean actually follow it, not just read it—then you'll add more than seven hours back into your week. You'll free up a ton of time. Most importantly, you'll get things done. Actual check marks will appear next to your tasks on your to-do list.

1. Set a Plan.

First, you've got to plan. I know, I know, it's old advice. You've heard it before, and it hasn't helped. You know why it didn't help? Because you didn't plan. You aren't forcing yourself to sit down with your task list and map out the course of the next day and week and month.

You've got to plan, or you're not going to get where you want to go.

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Planning isn't a one-time deal. It's an annual, monthly, weekly, and daily requirement. You've got to find the connections between your long-term objectives and the short-term tasks. If there isn't a connection, then something needs to go. Build a ritual for planning. The most effective people I know do their daily planning right before bed.

Pull out everything that matters—your task list, your notes, your open projects, etc.—and make sure you've added everything to the list. Go through the list and prioritize and assign deadlines. Then go through it again and get real. Which dates are hard, and which dates are soft? Now set the real date: the date on which you are going to get it done even if it means staying up all night. Give yourself plenty of time, but set a deadline you can actually meet.

Be very conscious of those projects and tasks you've been pushing back for a long time. Ask yourself why you're procrastinating.

- Does it involve something you don't understand?
- Do you need outside resources?
- Is it something you're just not going to do?

If it's not going to happen, then take it off the list. If you're going to do it, then make it part of the plan and stay committed.

2. Focus During the Golden Hour.

Second, start each day with something big and important. Focus on that thing. Don't answer the phone; don't check your email. Do the one thing. Assume you're only going to get an hour to do much of anything before the crap hits the fan and your day is lost. You need to stay on this project for the full hour without looking at anything else or talking to anyone not required for the project. Stay on task.

The morning matters. Do this important task first thing. With few exceptions, we are most creative, productive, and energized first thing in the day. It's when things actually get accomplished. It only happens if we avoid multitasking and stick to the task at hand. This first hour is the most important part of your workday. Use it or lose it, and you lose it at great cost to your success.

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3. Create an Excellent Workspace With Excellent Technology.

The space you work in matters. Oddly, I get more done in a crowded coffee shop than in a quiet office. Your mileage may vary. Most people get the most done in a quiet space without distractions. You know what works for you. It's key that you show up in that space each day for that critical first hour.

The furniture is important. Obviously, everyone has different preferences. Figure out what works for you and use it. Some prefer a standing desk. Others like an ergonomically correct chair. Some like a window; some need blank walls. Make the space perfect for you. Regardless of the space specifics, it needs minimal clutter. Clean it out. Ditch the distracting papers and objects.

The technology you employ is also a key to your productivity. Some lawyers thrive on a small laptop. Others use three big monitors connected to a powerful desktop computer. Figure out what works for you and use it.

Don't think of the technology as just hardware. Most important is the software you use. Document assembly technology and abbreviation expanders make a huge difference for those focused on creating documents. Document management, which makes it easy to find what you need, is critical.

4. Use Your Team: Delegate and Communicate.

You are only as good as your team. You need the right people in the right places, whether that means bodies in the office or virtual assistants an e-mail away. Good people can only do what's assigned, and you've got to be liberal with handing out the projects. Then you've got to communicate like crazy to be sure they understand the nature of the assignment and the reason it's important.

As you plan your day, decide whether you are the only person in your group who can handle the task. If someone else can do it, then pass it along. Don't hold onto the task or project even if you might do it better or faster. Limit your time to the work that only you can do.

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5. Take Frequent Breaks.

As important as it is to focus, it's also important to take breaks. If you kill it for an hour, you should then stop. Get up, walk around, and stretch. Some folks play a video game or watch something funny on YouTube. You decrease, rather than increase, your productivity when you keep your nose to the grindstone. You need to build some relief into the program.

Many lawyers skip lunch or eat at their desks. That's a mistake. Aside from your need to network, you also need to disconnect from the work focus for a few minutes. Get up and walk to lunch. Exercise your legs and think about other things. That way, you'll be energized when you return to the important tasks.

If you find yourself unable to take breaks, then build a reminder into your system. Download an app for your laptop or phone and have it remind you to switch gears. It's essential that you mix it up or, eventually, you'll just grind to a stop.

The same advice holds true with respect to bigger breaks. Schedule vacations away from the work. Disconnect. If you don't have anything booked now, then go ahead and schedule a vacation immediately. You should always have a vacation on the schedule within the next six months. It's hard to book at the last minute; it's much easier if you go ahead and commit now.

6. Establish a Habit.

Personal systems matter. Sticking to them matters more. Come up with a schedule. Account for variations in your agenda. You might need a court day schedule and an office day schedule. One might require getting started earlier than the other. Figure out a way to take advantage of that productive first hour even if it means waking up before dawn. That first hour is going to get you further faster than any other piece of advice.

Come up with a template for your days and fill the tasks in for the available slots. Some people hold space for client meetings at certain times of the day. Some allocate time for staff discussions as well. I find afternoons best for meetings since I'm less productive anyway. Think about the way your personal productivity flows during the day and put the right types of work at the right time of day.

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7. Save the Boring/Menial Stuff for Last.

You know how long you can keep going. You already know when you're going to hit the wall and run out of gas. That's the time to do the boring and menial stuff. Maybe you should wait until 5 PM instead of reading the news first thing? Maybe you should wait until the end of the day to review your weekly financial reports? Figure out what's least interesting and least important, and use your low-energy times for getting those tasks done.

8. Prepare for Disaster.

Finally, the unexpected will happen. Don't be surprised.

- You'll wake up to a broken computer. Have a spare in the closet. (Chromebooks are practically free.)
- You'll get hit with noise. Buy earbuds.
- Your phone will die. Download Skype as a backup.
- Your kids will be sick. Have someone ready to step in.

You get the idea. Disasters are mostly expected when you think about the big picture. Weather emergencies come every year. Family issues are normal and predictable. Plan for disaster. Don't let the disaster of the day drive you off course. That most productive hour is never coming back.

The Key to It All

Obviously, productivity takes some preparation and some discipline. Just thinking about productivity isn't going to make you more productive. You've got to set yourself up for success and then take focused, well-planned action. That's the key, and that's where the payoff originates. Get going, and you'll be one step closer to your goal.

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ABOUT

LEE ROSEN

Lee Rosen is the author of [Divorce Discourse](#), a blog offering advice about marketing, management, technology, and finance for legal professionals. He has practiced family law for more than 25 years. With four offices, [Rosen Law Firm](#) serves Raleigh, Charlotte, Durham, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Lee served as the Law Practice Management Editor of the ABA Family Advocate for more than a decade and received the ABA James Keane Award for excellence in eLawyering. In addition, he served as Chair of the Law Practice Management Section of the North Carolina Bar Association. Lee is a frequent speaker and is often sought out by the media as a source of family law insight and commentary. He is a regular contributor to [Lawyers Weekly](#), [TechnoLawyer](#), and other legal publications, and he hosts the weekly programs [Stay Happily Married](#) and [Divorce Talk Radio](#).

Over the past few years, Lee has helped rapidly growing family law practices take their management, marketing, and technology to the next level. He is also a frequent speaker at continuing education events for attorneys, judges, mental health professionals, accountants, physicians, and other providers of professional services.

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