

# 5 things attorneys need for improved efficiency

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The dictionary definition of efficiency is the act of “achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense.” For a law practice, this translates to excellent client services and enhanced profitability. Attorneys are constantly looking for ways to improve efficiency within their firms, so here are some things you can do achieve maximum productivity with minimum expense.

## 1. Fixed Fees

Fixed fees have become common within the legal community. Lawyers recognize the vast benefits of these billing arrangements and clients find them more agreeable than traditional hourly billing. Some attorneys continue to resist the transformation to fixed fees, largely due to fear of being under-compensated. However, when properly planned, a fixed fee case can help ensure adequate compensation while preventing such efficiency-stealing problems as fee disputes and wasted resources.

With fixed fee billing, you assess the needs of the case prior to commencement. Therefore, you have a greater understanding of what is necessary for successful completion.

Fixed fee arrangements also promote more productive work processes. For example, a law firm partner may assign unlimited hours to an associate for research about some aspect of a property dispute that is only slightly relevant to the case, even though spending substantial hours on the issue does not further the client’s overall goal.

Fixed fees create an incentive for attorneys to move the case along in a more productive manner. Since it is in the firm’s best interest to complete the matter in a timely fashion and move on to those tasks that actually advance the case.

## 2. Delegation

Attorneys notoriously identify with the mantra, "If you want something done right, do it yourself." But, this is not the type of thinking that improves the efficiency of your law firm. You are tasked with countless responsibilities on any given day, and there's no way that you can effectively handle them all without the help of your office staff. Allow them to do what you hired them to do, so you can better leverage your limited time and resources.

Consider the following benefits that come from an efficient delegation of tasks:

- **Increased profitability** – Poor delegation negatively affects profitability by using higher cost resources to handle tasks that could be more efficiently handled by support staff members. Save your higher billing attorneys for the more profitable tasks.
- **Expanding staff skillset** – You can increase the knowledge and skill sets of your staff members by entrusting them with responsibilities that expand their capabilities. Proper delegation also gives these workers a greater sense of trust from you, which promotes positive morale and increased commitment to the firm.
- **Better use of resources** – With effective delegation, your higher-billing attorneys have the freedom to take on matters that require an elevated level of skill, strategy, and knowledge. These also happen to be the types of matter that bring more profit to the firm.

## 3. Project Management

Legal Project Management (LPM) involves planning the tasks involved in handling a matter, so it is completed with the greatest level of productivity and efficiency. It makes fixed fee billing easier to implement, while also promoting the matter's profitability.

LPM promotes law firm efficiency through:

- Proactive calculations of matter profitability
- Real-time review of time-keeper tasks
- Identification of resource-stealing problems
- Timely changes to improve matter productivity

- Insight into the best methods for handling similar matters in the future
- Promotion of healthy, ongoing attorney-client relationships to prevent costly client disputes

In short, effective LPM helps your firm's efficiency with happy clients, profitable matters, and productive case management.

#### **4. Process Management**

Poor processes can create a major impediment to the efficiency of your legal practice. For example, a bottleneck in your intake process could keep you from successfully securing new clients. Bottlenecks in your invoicing process could lead to unpaid client bills and financial challenges for the firm.

Before you can improve the efficiency of your firm processes, you must first identify the potential problems and address them. Consider whether there are areas where work is not getting done. It shouldn't be too hard to find these problems because they turn into serious issues if left unaddressed.

Once you know where your law firm processes are breaking down, fix them. Look for ways to standardize your workflow. Repetition is common within the practice of law, so why are your staff members constantly reinventing the wheel?

With an established system in place, they don't have to reinvent anything. Potential problems are handled quickly and efficiently in a systematic manner. Standardization is key to increased productivity and improved profits.

#### **5. Employ Technology**

The marketplace is filled with tech options to help run your law office more efficiently. Apps like 1Password manage those passwords you use on a regular basis, while Evernote assists you in the organization and management of all your random notes and ideas. There are also numerous calendaring applications to keep you organized and up-to-date on all of your upcoming appointments.

If you're looking for technology specific to the legal industry, there is no shortage there either. An effective practice management software helps

you manage client case files and assist with compliance requirements, while the right legal billing system promotes accurate timekeeping and invoicing throughout your practice.

TimeSolv's legal time tracking allows you to track time from virtually anywhere in the world, promoting even greater efficiency. Their time-tracking app is highly available through a convenient smart phone application, and their billing backups allow your staff members to quickly import tracked time into customizable invoices.

These five tips could be the only things standing between maximized efficiency and your legal practice. Take an objective look at your firm and figure out which of these changes could prove beneficial. Remember – greater efficiency is often the first step towards greater profitability.

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#### **About Erika Winston:**

*Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, Personal Touch Edits, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.*