6 Time Management Tips for Family Law Firms

Legal professionals who excel at time management can make it look absolutely effortless. They're always prepared for client meetings, they respond promptly to emails, and they track their hours like it's second nature to them.

But here's a little industry secret. Time management is a skill that anyone can build—and these six tips can get you started.

1. Know your goals and priorities

When every task is a fire that needs to be put out, it's actually harder to get work done. We suggest starting every day by reviewing your task list and identifying which tasks are:

- Must-do tasks: Items that need to be handled by the end of the day
- Need-to-do tasks: Items that need to be done by the end of the week
- Nice-to-do tasks: Items without a fixed deadline

Framing your work in these terms helps deescalate stress over what needs to be done and when.

Ideally, you can build enough time into your project timelines that you can shift tasks to accommodate pressing matters as they come up—but knowing your goals and priorities can also help you set expectations for others when new tasks arise.

2. Do the hardest tasks first

Everyone has some part of their job that feels harder to do than others. Maybe you don't enjoy a particular type of case. Perhaps a certain client

causes you stress. Or there might be an administrative responsibility that you'd rather avoid.

But even though you'd rather not think about those tasks, they still take up space in your brain—and the longer you put them off, the more space they take up.

If you front-load these tasks, you might find that it's easier than you anticipated to work through. And even if you don't enjoy it, completing the work frees up time and energy to focus on the work that you do enjoy.

3. Give yourself deadlines

Deadlines make the professional world go round, and the legal industry is an especially deadline-driven world. Court dates. Filing dates. Response deadlines. Family law firms have a lot of deadlines to keep in balance.

Managing deadlines is all about creating reasonable expectations for how long something will take. Do this by following these best practices:

1. Establish your scope of work for the task

In other words, what's the end goal for the work?

If a new client is seeking help resolving a custody dispute, make sure it's clear what they see as a successful outcome for the case. This helps you figure out how much time to anticipate spending on their matter.

2. Identify the final deadline for the task

There isn't a one-size-fits-all strategy for figuring out deadlines for legal work. Litigation matters may have procedural deadlines that need to be adhered to or a client may be operating on a certain timeline—for example, a member of a divorcing couple may be moving out of state for work.

The one rule of thumb that always applies is to expect the unexpected. Circumstances will inevitably change and you'll have to adapt.

Concerned that detours along the way will throw off your timeline? Time management software like TimeSolv can help you stay on track by setting time budgets for your work.

3. Determine which tasks (and subtasks) go into the work and who is responsible for them

You don't need to plan out every single thing that you need to do for a legal matter, but having a rough outline of the steps involved makes it easier to know what needs to be done.

Identify the key parts of a process or task, then figure out who is responsible for them to create clear expectations for how a task should be completed. If these tasks are routine parts of your law firm's operations, consider setting up a task template or a standard operating procedure to make them easy to repeat.

4. Leverage software solutions to keep track of it all

Let's face it—an old-school calendar or planner rarely cuts it anymore. While there are definite benefits to traditional pen-and-paper methods, it just doesn't make sense to overlook the robust tools available for tracking projects.

Once you've established scope, deadlines, and tasks for a matter, keep it all moving forward by using the right legal software tools. Time tracking and billing platforms like TimeSolv allow busy family law firms to get a birds-eye view of everything going on at their firm:

- Track milestones in a matter
- Set up billable hour budgets for projects
- Share information with clients and employees to ensure transparent communication
- And more

4. Block out time for focused work

What do you do after you have priorities and a deadline?

Do the work, of course!

But that can be easier said than done, especially when you're also juggling meetings, appointments, and unexpected Zoom calls. All those little outside responsibilities are part of the job, but they can also drain away your available time for focused work—and this can be a problem when it comes

to time management. (Especially when you're trying to work on billable matters.)

Rather than simply adding a deadline, make sure you block out specific time to work on the project. You don't need to complete the project in one sitting—instead, focus on blocking out enough time to complete one part of it. Repeat as needed.

5. It's okay to delegate and outsource sometimes

Not all legal work can be delegated or outsourced. Depending on where you practice, ethics rules may prohibit delegating some tasks to non-attorneys—think representing a client in court or giving legal advice.

Moreover, it's generally agreed that complex and high-risk legal tasks should only be assigned to attorneys with the necessary experience.

A lot of work goes into running a legal practice, though, and there's no shortage of tasks that can be effectively delegated or outsourced. For example, filing or running client intake can often be effectively handled by non-attorney team members. Marketing tasks are another great opportunity to leverage others' professional know-how while freeing up your time to focus on billable hours.

And don't forget about using automation as a way to "delegate."

Automations can streamline your workflow by eliminating repetitive, manual tasks—think automated billing workflows like TimeSolv's invoicing solutions. Not only does automation free up your time, it can also create a more consistent client experience.

Better time management for family law firms

Family law firms are busy, but with the right practices put in place, busy doesn't have to mean hectic or stressful—when workflows are streamlined and efficient, it can also mean productive and profitable. To learn more about how TimeSolv's time management and legal billing software can help your firm, contact us for a free, no-obligation trial.