

# It's About Time



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This article is the result of recent conversations with three people—my wife, a good friend who is very ill, and a disciplined attorney. Their separate reminders to me of the value of making the most of our time caused much reflection. I thought about my own

We all have heard folks try to tell us how we can use time more efficiently. Their mantra of “doing more in less time” is usually greeted by us with a “yeah right, sounds great but . . .” Most of us would prefer to figure out how to do *less* with more time.

I realize it is risky business indeed to take on a new job and immediately try to convince my bosses—you—that we should all work less! The number of hours on the job to most of you is money. In addition, if we are willing to admit it, at times it becomes a badge of honor. The more we work, the busier we are, the more we earn . . . yep, we all have been there.

The attorney I mentioned was disciplined for poor communication with clients. He had bad office practices, bad time management, and little prioritization of work versus other time needs. Work was all encompassing. The one thing he did not put on his calendar was time for his family, time for civic responsibilities, time to exercise his faith, or even just plain time for himself and his own health.

It is the same familiar story for my sick friend. As for my wife, she has seen me give

others said that I was a great motivator and that we accomplished much. Then, an amazing thing happened: I left and the world did not stop turning!

It struck me after my conversations that it was high time for me to reassess my use of time and to actually do something about it. This ever-increasing press of time may pose the greatest danger to us as a profession and as caring people.

Have you ever thought of the old practice (it may still exist) of young doctors being forced to work outrageously long hours for long periods of time? I always thought I did not want to be the patient seen at the end of that rite of passage. Quality not quantity was my interest.

Though some of us may not be living in this tornado of ever-increasing activity, many—if not most—of us are. It is not only affecting our personal lives, but also our service to our clients. Just listen to what the public, our secretaries, our legal assistants, and even our fellow lawyers are saying about the number of our billable hours. If the high numbers of billable hours are accurate, there

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use of time and the misuse of time I've observed in those attorneys who fail to take control of how their days are spent.

This problem is, in my opinion, the greatest contributing factor to discipline complaints. Its impact goes far beyond those few complaints against the few truly rotten apples in an otherwise good barrel of lawyers.

many a great presentation to fellow lawyers on the subject, but not enough of me practicing what I preach.

I knew a boss once who supervised a lot of people, and he was fond of saying, “everyone is dispensable, but me.” He was close to being right. When I was in Florida for 15 years and in my other management jobs,

is little time outside of work, and to many we are skirting the line of credibility with how we bill. Many feel it is becoming the hidden scandal—this “inventive” way to bill. I've taught many a class to attorneys who have had discipline complaints for minor neglect, poor communication, and bad client relations. The common, if not universal,

thread that binds them together is trying to do too much in too little time in order to earn a better living.

In those classes, I show them a demonstration aid of a mock dollar bill. One part of it shows \$200 and another shows one hour. It is our choice whether we get another \$200 or give an hour to our spouse, family, society, or God. Part of the answer rests with each one of us individually. However, we together as Bar members and we at the State Bar and local bars can help by refocusing our purpose on finding ways to make your practice more efficient so you have more time. In my opinion that is what a State Bar should be about—combining brainpower, energy, and resources to help you help the public.

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As to our individual responsibility, my suggestion sounds simple, but I am going to mark down on my calendar time for my family, my health, and my civic and faith commitments. I may not make them all, but they go down first—not as a fill-in after everything else is put in. Those times will get as high a priority as requests by the president of the Bar, or even of you.

Maybe my risky example can help encourage you to do what we all want to do, but just never do. It may mean fewer clients or less money for you. As for me, if I can keep my word to my wife and sick friend, and if I can truly balance work with family, then it is worth the risk.

That is how I see it—what about you? If you have fought this good fight and prevailed, let us know so we can share your ideas.

Share your thoughts/concerns. Please forward comments to [voice@mail.michbar.org](mailto:voice@mail.michbar.org). ♦

## NOTICE VACANCIES

THE STATE BAR Board of Commissioners is seeking names of persons interested in filling the following vacancy:

### **ABA House of Delegates—State Bar Delegates**

(Two vacancies for two-year terms beginning at the close of the ABA Annual Meeting in July; one must be under 36 years of age to be nominated by the Young Lawyers Section for the Young Lawyer Delegate vacancy)

The ABA House of Delegates has the ultimate responsibility for establishing Association policy, both as to the administration of the Association and its positions on professional and public issues. The House elects officers of the Association and members of the Board of Governors; it elects members of the Committee on Scope and Correlation of Work; it has the sole authority to amend the Association's By-laws; and it may amend the Constitution. It authorizes committees and sections of the Association and discontinues them. It sets Association dues upon the recommendation of the Board of Governors.

### **Deadline for Responses is APRIL 6, 2001.**

Applications received after the deadline indicated will not be considered. Those applying for an agency appointment should submit a résumé and a letter outlining interest in the ABA, current position in the ABA, work on ABA committees and sections, accomplishments, and contributions to the State Bar and to the ABA. Appointments made by the board will be published in the *Bar Journal*.

The Michigan Supreme Court has requested that the Board of Commissioners of the State Bar of Michigan submit two recommendations for each lawyer position subject to Court appointment or nomination. The Court has indicated that it will give the board's recommendations serious consideration but reserves to itself the right to decide who it will appoint or nominate.

The Nominating Committee of the Board of Commissioners will screen interested applicants and submit its recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for candidates to be identified to the Court for the following positions:

### **Attorney Discipline Board—Lawyer Members**

(One vacancy for a three-year term beginning October 1, 2001).

The Attorney Discipline Board's internal rules and its powers and duties are defined in Michigan Court Rule 9.110(A-D).

Persons interested in an appointment should review this Court Rule for details of the powers and duties of a board member.

### **Attorney Grievance Commission—Lawyer Members**

(Two vacancies for three-year terms beginning October 1, 2001).

Pursuant to MCR 9.108(A), the Commission is the prosecution arm of the Supreme Court for the discharge of its constitutional responsibility to supervise and discipline Michigan attorneys.

Persons interested in an appointment should review this Court Rule for details of the powers and duties of a Commissioner.

### **State Bar Board of Commissioners**

(One vacancy for a three-year term beginning at adjournment of meeting of outgoing board held at the Annual Meeting).

The Board of Commissioner's powers, functions and duties are defined in Rule 5, Section 1 of the Supreme Court Rules Concerning the State Bar of Michigan.

Persons interested in an appointment should review this Rule for details of the powers and duties of a Commissioner.

### **Deadline for Responses is APRIL 6, 2001.**

Lawyers interested in being considered for nomination should advise in writing by letter addressed to Bruce W. Neckers at State Bar headquarters outlining their qualifications and forwarding a copy of their résumé. The committee will prepare its recommendations for board consideration at the June 9, 2000 meeting. The recommendations submitted to the Court by the board will be published in a future issue of the *Bar Journal*.

Interested persons should write:

**Bruce W. Neckers**  
c/o State Bar of Michigan, Michael Franck Building  
306 Townsend Street, Lansing, MI 48933-2083