

# THE DAILY RECORD

Tuesday, September 03, 2019 / Volume III / Number 170 / \$2.00 • Western New York's trusted source for legal and real estate news

## Calendars, scheduling essential to keeping work and personal life organized

### Work/Life Harmony

Lawyers share how they integrate work and home life in this new feature in The Daily Record.



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I write often. Dozens of emails per day. Last month, on a Wednesday, the first email was sent at 8:05 a.m. and the last went out at 11:40 p.m. In between, there were e-filings and more writing: a demand letter, a brief, an article. I am coordinating with my wife to pack kids' lunches, sign forms, check homework, transport the boys to lessons and practices, schedule house stuff, family stuff and car stuff. And I fit those in between the first and last emails of the day. In looking back at what works and what has not worked for purposes of writing this column, a few themes emerged.

**Everything is calendared.** Planning ahead is critical for me. I calendar all work and personal appointments. I either personally calendar the events or ask my administrative assistant to put dates on the calendar for me.

Over time, I have come to realize that if I don't schedule important activities, they might not get done or not get done on the timing that would be ideal. I like the Outlook calendar function. My wife still uses a leather-bound notebook to track appointments. Through trial and error, I have discovered that having a clear idea of what needs to happen or to be completed during the day is important to getting the important tasks done by the court-ordered or spouse-requested deadline.

**Detailed scheduling.** In the beginning, I scheduled deadlines for motions, client appointments, court appearances and internal meetings, but little else. Now, while my scheduling during the week still includes court dates, lunches and coffee meetings, and court appearances, I also schedule other important tasks. I call these important events or to-do items — non-negotiables. For example, picking up kids from school or the sitter falls into this category. Our children's pre-K center had a rule to impose fines on parents for late pickups, so that motivated me to become religious about afternoon pick-up appointments for which I was responsible. In the last few years, as our two sons have grown up, I schedule their lessons, practices and the days when the kids have an early morning activity which might require transportation to school. Sometimes the calendar entry even says, "Lv at 4:40 for 5p pick up at Naz" (the boys take lessons at Nazareth College).

**Not-to-do lists help.** In the past,

I would get stressed about being too busy. These days, I just accept that my week might flip from busy to very busy or, sometimes, ridiculous. One thing I tested which works is to make a "not-to-do" list. Items that go on the not-to-do list might include excessive surfing, resetting my fantasy football line-up or limiting myself to one episode of my favorite show instead of watching all of Season 5 of "The Wire" in one sitting. But it also might include delegating drafting or a discrete research assignment to a colleague or my amazing paralegal and/or taking a difficult file with a two-week deadline and giving it to my administrative assistant with a request that it come back for review in a week. I've also experimented with taking an informal pre-audit on Sunday afternoons or evenings to calculate how much drafting/writing I have for various projects in the coming week. If the audit reveals I have more than 25 hours of writing projects (not including emails or time spent commuting, phone calls or meetings), then I know that I'll probably need to be extra selective in agreeing to take on new, time-consuming projects over the coming week. Learning to say "no for now" is an important skill-set, and one I think that can be acquired through practice.

**Making time for strategy.** Over time, I have also found that I have to schedule time to work on the 'important but not urgent' tasks, including strategy. Sometimes, the strategy that needs to be identified is how to get through the week. Things that I re-

view during “strategy time” might include the projects with Friday deadlines, and/or scheduling reminders for upcoming travel or setting intermediate deadlines for larger projects. I try to set aside time on my calendar for planning weekly. The idea for this came from an interview of an entrepreneur who uses Wednesdays for strategy time. He doesn’t schedule any calls or meetings on Wednesdays; the day is set aside for reading and writing only. I haven’t been able to set aside an entire day, weekly, for planning (yet) but I have found that I can set aside 90 minutes in the morning at least a couple times a month, for client development and/or other long-term projects. I’ve tried to make this a weekly thing, but I know through trial and error that inevitably I will get scheduled for a court conference or a time-sensitive client situation will come up or a kid will get sick — and the “important but

not urgent” task will be bumped for the “important and urgent.”

**Work balance, life balance.** I found that maintaining good physical health keeps me sharp. A few years ago, my friend, Ron, wrote a great article for Harvard Business Review called, “Regular Exercise is Part of Your Job.” The article explains that social scientists researching the impacts of exercise have determined that the benefits go beyond a healthier heart, better physique and lower blood pressure. What caught my attention was that the evidence suggests exercise improves how one thinks: sharper memory, prolonged mental stamina, and enhanced creativity. Ron also wrote about a study of 200 employees, which found that on the days when employees exercised, their work experience changed: the employees reported being more productive, having smoother interac-

tions with colleagues and enhanced mood. So, I have successfully kept up my fitness routine for the last many years and would like to think I am benefitting from better memory and creativity.

**Testing sweatworking.** Recently, I have been experimenting with sweatworking. So far, only one referral source has been willing to meet me at the gym to catch up, but if the benefits are to keep up a professional relationship while also improving mental stamina and creativity, I’m inclined to keep up the habit.

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