

**M**obile phones, email, and PDAs. Time-saving devices? Yeah, right. In my first law firm, a letter would take several days to complete (typed by word processing operators, remember them?) and three or more days to arrive at its destination. A few days for the other lawyer to consider a response, several more to prepare it, and a week later

## Seven Time Tips for Busy In-house Lawyers

BY RONALD F. POL

I'd receive the reply. Armed only with sharp pencil and agile mind, lawyers had plenty of time to counsel clients.

Now, with countless time-saving devices, ironically it seems we barely have enough time to catch our breath. Lawyers report workload and time pressures are at breaking point—and mounting. Something has to give. Here are seven tips people tell me they have particularly appreciated.

### Use the Matrix

Put all of your work into four categories using the following matrix<sup>1</sup> based on urgency and importance. The imminent takeover that will determine the company's survival is urgent and important, category 1; and so on.

The math symbols indicate what



you should do with the work in each category.

Category 1—Multiply: when the company is at stake, you should do nothing else.

Category 2—Add: you should start doing this work, or do more of it.

Category 3—Divide: do less of this work, or delegate it to others.

Category 4—Subtract: stop doing this work.

### Clear the Clutter

As you allocate a category for all your work, action it immediately.

Categories 3 and 4 quickly disappear to colleagues and the shredder. Cleared space allows renewed focus on the work that matters.

### Eliminate or Delegate

You've already ditched category 4 work. For category 3 you can eliminate, delegate, or do it yourself. If you shouldn't be doing it yourself, ask whether you should even delegate it. But if it can't be eliminated, delegate routine and time-consuming activities not part of your core role to colleagues, law firms, and other outside specialists.

### Turn Off to Tune In

When do you work best? Schedule a meeting with yourself, and turn off the phones and email notification for an hour or two each day. If you're dealing with the most important issues well, you won't be answering emails as they arrive anyway. A good time manager responds more slowly to some things than poor time managers.

### Spend Money to Save Time

Sure, your budget's being slashed, but don't spend time to save money. Instead, spend money to save time.

You can research the law yourself, or have a law firm do it and go straight to the decision making phase. To improve operational efficiencies and save costs, don't spend months researching industry benchmarks and options if you can buy this and go straight to strategy development and implementation.

### Meetings Don't Need to Last an Hour

There's no law of physics requiring one hour meetings. If you call a meeting, set it up for 30 minutes if that's all it should take, and use an agenda to focus that time. If you're an attendee, check if you really need to be there; and when your part is over—leave. Twenty minutes into a meeting, the chair of my former company politely asked if there was anything more he could add, and if not, would leave. He didn't waste his time, and respected others' too. This isn't restricted to the boss.

### There's Magic in a Page

Need to outline options and make recommendations? Do it in one page instead of 10 and notice the impact. You'll focus on the essence of your advice, not write all you know about it. Almost always, recipients will prefer pithy advice, saving them time, too. If you can't quite make the break, add "ask me for a more detailed explanation." If asked to do so 10 percent of the time, you've saved time for the other 90 percent, and added greater value to the recipients who didn't ask for more information—less really is more. 

#### NOTE

- 1 This matrix is so widely used that its attribution is uncertain. It's been suggested that it started with Stephen Covey, with the math symbols a later modification.

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Email [editorinchief@acc.com](mailto:editorinchief@acc.com).



RONALD F. POL is past president of New Zealand's Corporate Lawyers' Association, general counsel for public and private organizations, and advises legal departments and law firms. He welcomes comments at [ronald.pol@teamfactors.com](mailto:ronald.pol@teamfactors.com).