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Balance In A Lawyer's Life? You're Kidding, Right?

By [Dawn Wagenaar](#) on April 22, 2009 @ 5:00 am in [Law Associates](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

In an ideal world, my typical work day would look something like this:

5:30 a.m. Rise cheerfully and spend a little quiet time having tea and reading.

6:30 a.m. Showered and ready, I straighten up the house and plan something for dinner, then wake my daughter and we spend morning time with my husband eating a nice hot breakfast.

7:30 a.m. I kiss my husband and daughter goodbye as they head off to work and preschool and I go to the office.

8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. I meet with clients, handle paperwork and billing, follow up on projects and check in with my productive team.

5:30 p.m. I head to a yoga class or go for a run.

6:30 p.m. I enjoy a nutritious dinner with my husband and daughter, do housework and the bedtime routine.

8:30 p.m. I follow up on calls, paperwork and emails.

9:30 p.m. I spend quality time with my husband.

10:30 p.m. I'm in bed for a blissful sleep.

This is the myth of balance: a compartmentalized section of time for each important piece of your life. Unfortunately, when your daughter catches a cold, you get a flat tire, a client calls without a scheduled appointment, and your in-laws are coming to town while you are planning a major business trip, balance is the last thing on your mind. Survival would be a more appropriate goal.

Plan For Contingencies

As you progress in your career, you will have more success and enjoy more sanity if you learn the art of fluidity. Fluidity looks something like this:

5:30 a.m. Wake to the sound of your child crying or your neighbor making a racket. Start the coffee pot.

6:30 a.m. Showered and ready, you hold out hope that the day will not go completely as you expect. Take a deep breath and dive in. (Having your briefcase packed the night before and eating a good breakfast can help you weather last-minute surprises like traffic jams and missing socks.)

7:30 a.m. Remember that it's your turn to pick up staff meeting treats. Call the office and let them know you'll be in later than expected.

8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Meet with clients, handle a call from spouse about the checkbook balance, order a cake for the in-laws and schedule a haircut, work on paperwork and billing, follow up with a client on a case question for the third time, attend staff meeting that was rescheduled from yesterday, coordinate with secretaries on depositions, proof latest legal blog, get an invitation to spend happy hour with an important client, call spouse to rearrange dinner plans.

5:30 p.m. Think about exercise while at happy hour with client.

7:30 p.m. At home, spend time talking and eating reheated dinner with spouse.

8:30 p.m. Follow up on calls, paperwork and emails.

9:30 p.m. Spouse is asleep. Do laundry.

10:30 p.m. Think about reading the book you started before Christmas.

To endure a day like this, being flexible and fluid is key: it can mean the difference between calm focus on the task at hand or an angry outburst.

Learn The Art Of Fluidity In Three Steps

To build a sense of fluidity into your work day, try these suggestions:

1. Focus on what's in front of you. Every morning the sun will rise and set and you will do your best in between to accomplish the day's most important tasks. They may not be the tasks you have on your to-do list, so allow yourself to roll with the demands that come your way. If you had a social engagement planned and your boss needs a case file reviewed, accept the challenge of being the go-to associate.

2. View your week in a seven- rather than five-day cycle and extend your idea of business hours. This is counterintuitive to the traditional work/life balance ideal, but it's great for fluidity. For example, you could set up your weekend as stretching from Friday afternoon through Sunday morning and then work on Sunday afternoon or evening. You could set aside non-demanding business tasks like reviewing blogs or reading trade pubs for Saturday during your workout.

Think about your energy level; at what times of day are you most productive and how does this correspond to the demands of your job? If you're a night owl, find out if you can schedule late office hours a couple days a week. This will all depend on firm expectations and policies, but the more you prove yourself to be a valuable team player, the more flexibility you will gain.

3. Schedule downtime. If you feel as though you are working all of the time, you'll just become another legal industry casualty. Get together with colleagues and friends for lunch, happy hour or weekend activities. During the work week, take mini-breaks by stepping outdoors, listening to music, stretching or creating a wish list. Do things that refresh your mind, including eating small snacks like nuts and fruit throughout the day.

Fluidity doesn't segment your life but integrates it. If your goal is to do fulfilling work that blends well with your other interests and responsibilities, you have the right attitude.

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