



Would you go to work drunk every day?

When you don't get enough sleep that's exactly what you're doing. The impacts of sleep deprivation are the equivalent of turning up to work drunk.

Why working less than 40 hours a week and sleeping more will increase your productivity!

As an expert in Legal Project Management and Legal Process Improvement, I was surprised how many lawyers I work with don't have the basic foundations of good working habits and personal productivity. I found myself unexpectedly coaching many of them in how to set up good productivity habits and sharing tools that I had been using and refining over decades in the corporate world as an extremely successful project manager and academic.

Unreasonable working conditions

It concerns me to see the way many large firms treat their junior lawyers, with expectations of ridiculous hours of work all in the hope that they will one day make partner and profit from the exploitation of other junior lawyers like themselves. The recent Banking Royal Commission here in Australia is a great example of utterly inhumane working conditions for junior lawyers that had many large firms blatantly and ignorantly breaching the UN Global Compact – click [here](#) to see the 10 Principles behind this international framework and commitment to sustainability and equality.

I know of situations during the Banking Royal Commission where junior lawyers worked for 30 days straight with no breaks and received no additional compensation and no time of in lieu – it was just expected, almost like a 'rite of passage'. Other examples included junior lawyers regularly having only 5 hours off before they came back to work the next day despite examples of employees actually dying under these circumstances in Japan and the UK. And perhaps the most extreme instance of a wedding being postponed. WOW! This is outrageous and completely unacceptable. Every professional knows there will be times when a superhuman effort is required, but this should be an occasional necessity and not expected for prolonged periods.

All of these unreasonable working conditions are created by a lack of planning and a lack of empathy!

Work-life balance

Now I also know there are lots of great Partners out there, and amazing firms, that are wonderful places to work and provide fantastic working environments, as well as reasonable work-life balance.

Some of them are my personal friends – one standout example is a Managing Partner who takes more leave than anyone else in the firm and always tops the billings as well. I've worked with him and his team and there is a highly flexible and balanced approach to work. His team love coming to work and have become increasingly efficient and effective over the years. They work long hours sometimes and then find time to relax and work a little less as well.

Be careful what you measure

I've seen press articles in recent months applauding one UK firm about their innovative approach to ensuring that junior lawyers receive bonuses related to the hours they work, instead of all the benefit going to the Partners. On the surface it seems like a great initiative and I'm certain they have taken this action in an attempt to be more equitable and provide an incentive for junior lawyers to stay at and join the firm.

Well as a Certified Lean Six Sigma Blackbelt, I believe this new supposedly improved incentive model will have an absolute negative impact on both the work quality and the health of these young lawyers, and this is why...

It is widely known by productivity professionals that it is critical to select the performance measures that will drive the desired performance outcomes. This requires careful data and behavioural analysis.

In my view, providing junior lawyers with a massive bonus when they bill 2,500 hours in a year will burn them out and lead to increased dissatisfaction. Very basic math indicates these junior lawyers will need to bill 50 hours consistently for 50 weeks, that's 10 billable hours per day!

It reminds me of the scene from *Downton Abbey* where Lady Grantham (played by Maggie Smith) asks Mathew Crawley (played by Daniel Stevens) the question "What's a weekend?". As an aristocrat with no exposure to the new professional class, it's understandable that she was baffled by the term. What is more relevant is that Mathew was a Lawyer from Manchester and even back in the early 1900's lawyers actually got to have weekends off.

Even lawyers deserve to have weekends!

Working long hours drastically reduces quality

If you're regularly pulling hours well in excess of 40 hours a week, then you're undermining your productivity without realising.

Working long hours on a regular basis limits the time that you have to look after yourself and in turn erodes your productivity.

If you're tired you are less productive and do lower quality work which wastes time due to re-work. And clients really don't want to pay for unnecessary rework!

Here are some further thoughts from my **Personal Productivity Online Course** –

- If you are neglecting your health, diet and fitness then you will lower your productivity – research shows that you will be more productive if you keep yourself fit, get great sleep, eat well, spend time with friends and family, or allowing time for your favourite pastime.
- If you're aware of your more productive and less productive times, then you can maximise your productivity by taking advantage of your natural rhythms to schedule work that requires higher focus for the times when you are more productive
- You might be a very social person who accidentally wastes time at work. It is important to nurture positive working relationships with teammates and it's okay to have short breaks when you catch up about non-work-related topics – indeed short breaks will improve your productivity. Although when there are deadlines it is important to reduce this activity so that you can focus and still get home at a decent hour or get off to your exercise class.
- Something else to consider, is that when you absolutely love what you do then it simply doesn't feel like work. Not many people are in this mindset.

What does productivity even mean?

“Personal productivity is an individual's ability to complete work, in order to achieve specific outcomes, within a reasonable timeframe.”

Settling on one, ideal and universally agreed definition for personal productivity is impossible as it is by definition very 'personal' and unique to each individual. I came up with the above definition after recently skimming research and articles on the topic.

The term workplace productivity refers to how much work can be accomplished in a work environment and how efficiently workers complete tasks in their workplaces. Given that lawyers are highly skilled knowledge workers who are increasingly able to work remotely, it is less relevant to consider how much work can be done in the workplace and how much work can be accomplished in order to achieve outcomes and have a reasonable work-life balance.

Many of these concepts are highly personal and subjective, so the key is coming up with a definition of personal productivity that works for each individual.

Most lawyers I've worked with are looking for ways to get more high-quality work done, within a normal working day, so they can improve their work-life balance. Although the length of a normal day can vary from between 8 to 12 hours.

When you consider the onerous hours that many lawyers currently spend at work then it would be blissful to have a normal working day of 8 hours from start to finish. Lives would be enriched by spending time with friends and family, keeping fit and engaging in rewarding pastimes. And these lawyers would turn up day on day feeling refreshed and able to perform at their maximum productivity levels every day. There is a virtuous cycle.

The link between sleep and productivity

There has been extensive research conducted into the effects of sleep deprivation on cognitive ability. Some of the best comes from prestigious academic institutions including Harvard and Washington State University.

“Sleep is a mystery”

“Sleep loss in humans degrades health, safety and productivity and increases the risk of errors and accidents. It has a profound impact on individuals and society.”

Taken from Washington State University's website on 15 February 2020 <https://labs.wsu.edu/sprc/>

A summary of key findings across many studies indicate –

1. Getting less than 6 hours sleep per night over an extended period significantly reduces reaction speed, short term and long-term memory, ability to focus, decision making capacity and cognitive speed all suffer. It's the equivalent to staying awake for 18 consecutive hours.
2. Cutting sleep back to five or six hours a night for several days in a row, and the accumulated sleep deficit magnifies these negative effects
3. The impairment to cognitive ability of going 24 hours without sleep, or a week of sleeping four or five hours a night is quite alarming. In studies it has shown that it induces an impairment equivalent to a blood alcohol level of 0.1%. This is twice the level of the legal limit of blood alcohol levels allowed for driving in my state.

Let me repeat that for emphasis – sleeping less than 4 or 5 hours for one night is the equivalent of having a blood alcohol level of 0.1%.

Well over the legal limit to drive. I'm sure legal clients don't want drunk lawyers doing their work!

A summary of the key recommendations is as follows –

- Organisations should develop Employee Sleep Policies as part of their Work Health and Safety framework.
- Partner and executives should set behavioural expectations
- It's important to have a policy limiting scheduled work—ideally to no more than 12 hours a day, and exceptionally to no more than 16 consecutive hours.
- At least 11 consecutive hours of rest should be provided every 24 hours.
- Employees should not be scheduled to work more than 60 hours a week and never be permitted to work more than 80 hours a week
- People need at least one day off a week, and ideally two in a row, in order to avoid building up a sleep deficit.

Other super simple tips to increase your productivity

Almost everyone I work with wants to increase their productivity to accomplish more each day so that you can get home half an hour earlier to prepare and enjoy a meal with your family; or you might prefer to find ways to improve your productivity so that you can go to the gym every morning before work and leave at 5pm on a Friday to have a night out with your friends.

There are some super simple ways to improve your productivity that I have applied to my own working life and also shared with legal clients. These have yielded significant improvements without even having to look at major changes to processes or technology, including -

- Reducing distractions by consciously limiting work related conversations to the bare minimum to be polite and to foster good working relationships with team members
- Doing better quality work the first time around to reduce review and rework – this can often be accomplished through the development and use of precedents and more effective knowledge management to draw on good work product completed for similar past matters
- Improving your work environment so that you can concentrate more with less distractions – perhaps you can use a focus room for part of the day, ensure your work station is set up more ergonomically to reduce strain, or use two monitors as various studies have found this can increase productivity by between 20 and 35%
- Preparing and taking your own lunch and snacks to the office so that you don't need to leave the office to buy food
- Occasionally having a coffee or lunch time catch up with colleagues to discuss work and build relationships
- Time boxing your calendar to take advantage of your higher focus time
- Prioritising your work to ensure you don't waste time on non-urgent and non-important activities
- Getting enough good quality sleep – refer back to the research on sleep deprivation and its impact on cognitive ability
- Being physically fit and limiting intake of processed foods, sugar, alcohol and caffeine – there are numerous studies that link health and fitness to improved focus, higher productivity and exceptional cognitive ability
- Reduce multitasking as this actually reduces your productivity. Use time boxing techniques to ensure you can truly focus on high priority, critical activities
- Taking regular small breaks throughout the day to reset and re-energise – it's surprising how much your productivity increases after a small short break
- And lastly, getting enough sleep on a regular basis and having at least one, preferably two days off on the weekends!

The amazing benefits of regular work breaks

In an article posted on Psychology Today on 18 April 2017 - How do work breaks help your brain? 5 surprising answers - Meg Selig provides the following conclusions –

1. “Movement breaks” are essential for your physical and emotional health. The benefits of taking brief movement breaks have been well-researched. Just a 5-minute walkabout break every hour can improve your health and well-being.
2. Breaks can prevent “decision fatigue.” the need to make frequent decisions throughout your day can wear down your willpower and reasoning ability, and it can also lead to procrastination.
3. Breaks restore motivation, especially for long-term goals. For challenging tasks that requires our sustained attention, research shows briefly taking our minds off the goal can renew and strengthen motivation later. This is when those Important and Non-urgent tasks, that I cover in Module 1 of my Personal Productivity Tools Online Course, can be progressed before going back to the Important and Urgent tasks.
4. Breaks increase productivity and creativity. Working for long stretches without breaks leads to stress and exhaustion. Taking breaks refreshes the mind, replenishes your mental resources, and helps you become more creative.
5. “Waking rest” helps consolidate memories and improve learning. Scientists have known for some time that one purpose of sleep is to consolidate memories. However, there is also evidence that resting while awake likewise improves memory formation.

What’s Next?



This article was written by Therese Linton, Founder and Principal Consultant of The BASALT Group® encompassing The Positive Lawyer® and the Academy of Legal Leadership®. She is a global leader in the field of Legal Project Management and literally wrote the book. She also has unique expertise in Legal Process Improvement, Legal Portfolio Management, Legal Transformation and Legal Operations.

In addition to delivering training in LPM and LPI, Therese has spent much of the last decade coaching lawyers with an emphasis on productivity improvement and recently completed her certification as an NLP Practitioner to complement her skills in this area.

So if you want to super charge your productivity, stand out from the crowd and get your life back then take the first step and checkout the training programs and tools offered at www.basaltgroup.global

My aim is to inspire you to achieve great things and I look forward to joining you on your journey! Cheers....T