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Young Lawyers

BY KENDALEE WORKS, ESQ, YOUNG LAWYERS CHAIR

A STITCH IN TIME COULD SAVE YOUR CLIENTS, YOUR CAREER AND EVEN YOUR SANITY.

Or as those of us less eloquent than President Lincoln might say: “Don’t procrastinate!” This is my first YLS article and, as you might have already guessed, in writing my inaugural column, I failed to follow Abe’s sage advice. As many of us often do, I started with the best of intentions, jotting down a list of potential topics, revising, re-writing and reconsidering, but never actually getting started ... until I had left myself a less than desirable window of time in which to finish.

After the first wave of panic washed over me, I took a deep breath and realized I had my topic: procrastination.

Procrastination in any circumstance is not optimal but in the legal profession, the consequences can be especially dire, and young lawyers should take heed early in their careers. So, in no particular order, here are five reasons to avoid procrastination:

1. Your bosses will not be impressed.

Partners in law firms like few things less than realizing, late in the evening, that the status of a project they assigned to you is a complete mystery to them. Such realizations will undoubtedly lead to a closer associations with every lawyer’s dear friends: Lady Insomnia and Sir Heartburn (if you haven’t met these two yet, consider yourself lucky and rest assured that one of these nights, in the not too distant future, you will). Partners generally want to review drafts of associates’ documents before anything makes its way out the door. Leaving the partner little or no time to make necessary revisions puts both of you in a stressful spot. Keep your

superiors informed as to your work progress and expected delivery dates, and then actually deliver on that date. This will earn you their trust and lead to increased autonomy and often even to preferred assignments.

2. Your clients will not be pleased.

As lawyers, two of our main objectives are to:

1. Avoid committing malpractice; and
2. Keep the client happy.

Aw ... Easy right? Admittedly, some of your clients will not be paying attention to deadlines and will prefer to have as little involvement in their cases as possible, but you should never assume this will be the case. Most clients want to know what is going on and why and when something needs to be done. They will appreciate being kept in the loop and having the opportunity to offer feedback regarding critical documents or filings. If you put these things off, your clients will be deprived of the opportunity for such input. In the worst case scenario, this could mean malpractice. It will almost always lead to an unhappy client.

3. You will not be a happy lawyer.

Practicing law is stressful. Practicing law in a constant and unnecessary state of emergency adds to that stress and, over time, simply becomes intolerable. Remember that wave of panic that washed over me as I finally sat down to write this column? Well, I didn’t like it, and trust me, you won’t either. A task that I might otherwise have enjoyed became bogged down in anxiety because I pushed it off until the last minute. Waiting until the last possible moment to



submit a closing document or file a pleading will undoubtedly lead to sloppy work and mistakes. This is especially so when we are new to the practice of law; finding out at the last minute about a rule you had not previously considered, or realizing there is no time to get your hands on the document or declaration you need can prove catastrophic, which takes us right back to Reasons 1 and 2.

4. Unhappy lawyers are generally surrounded with even unhappier support staff.

You are probably already tired of hearing about how you must be good to support staff to be a happy and successful lawyer (“Isn’t this a given?” you ask yourself). Everyone is repeatedly telling you this because it is true and, surprisingly, often forgotten – even more so in the heat of a panicked race to the finish. The only people who will appreciate your knack for procrastination less than your bosses will be the support staff forced to stick around to pick up the pieces when things inevitably fall apart. Your assistant generally does not like to stay late any more than you do, so do not force him or her into this predicament. On the rare occasion after-hours work cannot be avoided, reward and thank them generously.

5. There is a rule about it!

You don’t have to take my word for it; the Nevada Supreme Court has spoken. Rule 1.3 of the Nevada Rules of Professional Conduct states: “A lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client.”

So with that, Young Lawyers, go forth and commence crossing things off your to do lists. You can thank me later... ■

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