Maximizing Your Marketing Talent

Strategic Time Management Tips

By Eva Wisnik

Managing your time as a Marketing/BD professional in a law firm is one of the most difficult aspects of the job. I recently presented a Time Management program to coordinators and specialists from a wide variety of law firms, and they confirmed how difficult it is for them to be proactive and to make time to focus on important marketing projects.

The reason that time management is so difficult for law firm marketers is because you are working for multiple bosses in a client-service, reactive work environment. This translates into having little control over what will hit your desk on any given day at any given minute.

How can you, as the Head of Marketing or the Marketing Partner, manage your most valuable resources — your talent — most effectively? Below are six time-management tips for Marketing and Business Development professionals to help your talent be most productive:

1. Help your Team Members Identify Their 'High-Value Projects'

What work brings the highest value to your firm? For example, the same way a Partner delegates work to the appropriate associate based on his or her level of expertise and billable rate, you want to utilize your team members' unique talents to execute on the highest level of functions they can deliver.

In order to do this, assess their skills and competencies and have an understanding of where each team member adds the greatest value. Your hiring and evaluation process should help you to identify where your team members should focus their time to achieve maximum results for the Firm. Support your team members' positive contributions and encourage them to focus on these core areas.

2. Tell Your Team That at Least Six Hours of Their Work-Day Will Be 'Reactive'

This is the nature of the job and a reality we must accept. If your staff expects to come to work and get six hours of proactive work done from their to-do list, they will be frustrated. Set realistic expectations for your staff and acknowledge that it is "normal" to dedicate six to eight hours of their day to being reactive: responding to lawyers' requests, putting out "fires" on current projects, phone calls, e-mails, etc.

3. Help Your Staff Stay Focused

The best way to help your staff to stay focused and capture those momentary opportunities to be proactive is for them to identify the high-value projects that need to be done. Once these are identified, schedule 15-minute to 20-minute chunks of time to work on them throughout the day. Encourage your staff to aim for about two hours of "focused" time a day and know upfront that this will probably occur in six or eight chunks of 15 to 20 minutes, in the midst of six hours of reactive time. The key is to accept that interruptions are part of our unique work environment and to learn how to focus on proactive projects when you have a few minutes.

4. Prioritize Requests

You have many requests coming into your department daily. How do you determine which requests are priorities and which are really only a "time suck" that end up wasting resources? Is your talent dropping important projects to work on these "ideas of the moment," which are often discarded the following day or never followed through on?

I had lunch recently with a very talented BD specialist who described a situation in which a Partner had him in his office for two straight days working on research for a new BD initiative — and then never used any of the research that was compiled. If this has ever happened in your department, develop a system to track the results of the projects your department takes on from various Partners.

Chances are the 80/20 rule will apply: where certain Partners are using up about 80% of your department's resources, but netting only 20% (or less!) of the business development results. By tracking requests for help and the subsequent results of those projects, you will have evidence as to which projects are the best investment of your team's time and be able to allocate your staff resources more efficiently.

5. Establish a 3 p.m. 'Check-up' Ritual in Your Department

The goal of this "check-up" is to stop and re-evaluate priorities. Interruptions and unexpected requests often divert what your team members originally had planned for the day. Three p.m. is a good time to take a three-minute time-out and reassess what they should focus on for the next few hours, so they can make the rest of the day as productive as possible. This is also a good time to follow up with Partners whose feedback is needed, or to delegate projects to appropriate resources in order to minimize end of the day crises.

6. Train Your Staff to Stop Interrupting Themselves

As mentioned, they need to stay focused on important projects. We are all guilty of distracting ourselves by surfing the web, making time for whoever stops by our office, etc. These types of interruptions are ones we can control! Give your team members permission to focus. You might set an example by occasionally closing your door when you have to get something important done

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that requires your full attention. Being responsive and available is very important, but creating time and space to really focus and be 100% present can be in your "client's" best interest when critical projects need to be completed.

We have to accept that there are aspects of our work and the legal environment that we do not have control over. However, we do have control over integrating effective time-management strategies in place for our talent and helping them feel more in control and productive of their work!

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