

Ep #29: Time Audits (Time Management Series)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Olivia Vizachero

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You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 29. Today, we're talking all about time audits. You ready? Let's go.

Welcome to *The Less Stressed Lawyer*, the only podcast that teaches you how to manage your mind so you can live a life with less stress and far more fulfillment. If you're a lawyer who's over the overwhelm and tired of trying to hustle your way to happiness, you're in the right place. Now, here's your host, lawyer turned life coach, Olivia Vizachero.

Well, hello there. How you doing today? I don't know about you, but things are pretty great over here. Are you ready for fall? It's literally right around the corner when this episode is coming out. And, I got a taste of fall weather when I was recently in Mexico City. And man, was it lovely.

I have to say that, you know, I really love summer. I like it hot. But the Mexico City weather was so refreshing. I was expecting it to be pretty hot because I was just in Florida. And based on like, as far as latitudes go, it is a little bit further south than where I was at in Florida.

So, I was expecting it to be even hotter. But when I got there, I realized because it's so mountainous, that it's actually really quite cool. So, it felt like fall. It was in like the mid-60's most of the time that I was there. And again, it was so refreshing.

So, coming back to Michigan after that trip, and it being in the middle of September now, I'm just so ready for fall. I get to break out my fall wardrobe, that has all of my signature colors in it. It's one of my favorite transitions of the year, bringing out all those jewel tones; lots of Navy, lots of burgundy, those rich jewel tone colors. I love it, it always puts a smile on my face.

Now, speaking of fall, before I dive into today's topic, I want to give you a rundown of what you can expect from me this fall. Like, break out your calendars, make sure you mark them, we've got a bunch of exciting stuff on the horizon. So, I want to make sure you're up to speed on all of the specifics, so you don't miss anything.

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Okay, I want you to be able to plan ahead, get everything on your calendar, know what's coming your way, so you can plan accordingly. So, you don't miss a beat. If you don't know this by now, every single month I teach a free masterclass. It's normally towards the end of the month, typically on Fridays, but I post all of the dates on my social media accounts.

I will also, in the show notes, tag the link, but I'm going to give you the dates right now, just so you have them handy, and you can mark your calendars if you want to register for them. I will give you the link in the show notes of how you can register for each one.

Okay. Now, for each of these master classes that I conduct, I cover a different topic. They're an hour long. And during that hour, we do a deep dive into whatever topic I'm covering for that session. And that's what I call these master classes, I call them my Less Stressed Sessions. They're so informative and valuable. If you haven't made it to one, you're going to want to make sure you don't miss the fall lineup.

Okay, so coming up for September, I'm teaching you how to build a book of business, that's on September 23rd. In October, we're going to cover how to set and honor boundaries, one of everyone's favorite topics that I teach, that's on October 28th. In November, we're going to cover how to be confident, that's on November 29th. And in December, we're really going to set the pace for 2023, so we're gonna go over how to stop tolerating the parts about your life that you don't love, and that's on December 16th.

Okay, all of my master classes are at noon Eastern time. If you go to my social media, and again, I'm going to link the sign-up for these in the show notes, as well. But if you go there, you can find the links, sign up, make sure you get them scheduled and on your calendar, okay? You don't want to miss them. They're so good.

Now, these upcoming masterclasses aren't the only things on the horizon. I'm getting ready to open the doors for enrollment into the next round of *The Less Stressed Lawyer* Mastermind. What's the mastermind? It's a six-month group coaching program that consists of a three-and-a-half-day live

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event, in person. We all get to come together for an immersive in-depth learning experience, where we cover all the fundamentals of coaching, and we set the foundation for our next six months of work together.

After the live event, we coach once a week, in a group. You get access to a member portal, a Facebook® group, and a ton of extra content that you can watch and consume on demand to take your learning and your growth even further. All right. Now, here are the specifics you need to know about enrollment. Okay.

Early enrollment for the mastermind is going to open up on October 28th. And you have to be on the mastermind waitlist, in order to be able to enroll during that time period. It's gonna go from the 28th to the 31st of October. Enrollment to the mastermind will not be open to the general public during that window.

So, if you're really interested, and I'm only going to offer a certain number of spots for the mastermind, if you're interested and you know you want one of those spots to be yours, you want make sure you get your name on the waitlist. And I'm gonna drop the link for that in the show notes, as well. But you want to make sure that you sign up for that, so you're the first to find out, you can be the first to secure your spot in this next group, during that early enrollment period.

After October 31st, on November 1st, I'm going to open it up for general enrollment, okay. Now, the mastermind itself doesn't kick off until the beginning of February. But enrollment starts October 28th, okay, that early enrollment period. And that gives you enough time to know that you're in, and to start planning your travel, and to get situated, in order to prepare yourself to do this work. To really commit, to show up fully, embrace it, and get to work. It's going to be so much fun.

So, I wanted to make sure you had all of that on your radar. All of my upcoming free masterclasses, and the upcoming enrollment for the next round of the *The Less Stressed Lawyer* Mastermind. So, mark your calendars for all of those dates. Okay.

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Now, let's dive in to today's topic. I'm so excited to talk about it, and kind of for a sadistic reason if I'm being completely honest. We're talking about time audits today. And this is not an understatement, not even kind of, people hate this topic. And, normally that wouldn't bring me joy. I don't... What's that called? Schadenfreude, I think when you take pleasure in other people's pain or suffering, that's not me.

That just is totally out of character, I don't enjoy that at all. But for some reason, I kind of do, with this very particular narrow topic. It just does it for me. All right. So, we're talking about time audits. And you might be asking yourself; Olivia, what the hell is a time audit? I'm about to tell you. All right.

But first, I want to set the stage and provide some context, if you're just tuning in, and this is the first episode you've listened to, or the first episode out of the time management series that you've listened to. So, how did we get here, to talking about time audits? Well, first and foremost, we've been going through the three P's, which are the three problems that most of my clients suffer from, or struggle with. And those are people-pleasing, perfectionism, and procrastination.

Now procrastination's, one of two parts of bad time management styles, right? You either procrastinate, or you're a firefighter and you're constantly scrambling and reshuffling and working in a really unintentional, reactive manner. Right. And I talked about that a couple of episodes ago. About firefighting and procrastinating and how you can be one or the other, or both, depending on what situation you're in or encountering.

And then, in the last episode, once I set the stage for how you might be managing your time, in either of those two models, we started to create some awareness as to why you're acting this way, or not doing the things that you need to be doing, and creating your time management results. It's because of those thoughts, right?

Now, today, we're creating some more awareness. We always want to start there, because if we're going to solve a problem, we have to make sure we know what's actually causing it in the first place. And why we're doing what

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we're doing, and what exactly it is that we're doing. Right. So, that's where time audits come in.

Now, what exactly is a time audit? Well, number one, it's a tool that helps us gain awareness, or exercise that helps us gain awareness. And it's essentially where you keep track of how you spend every minute of your day, all 24 hours of it. And what I recommend my clients to do, is to do that for a minimum of two weeks.

One week just simply isn't long enough, you might have some anomalies, or some outliers. So, you want to make sure you have a little bit more data than just one week, in order to gain accurate information. And to be able to make decisions going forward based on it, for that information to be reliable, right. That's what we're looking for.

You want enough information to be able to identify patterns. And doing this for two weeks, conducting a time audit for at least two weeks, will help you begin to see those patterns. Now, if you do this for an even longer period of time, like a month, it's going to be more impactful. I don't want you to do this forever, because I think we can end up buffering and indulging, in conducting this activity.

You want to use it and leverage it, and then put the information that you've gained into practice, to adapt and make changes to how you manage your time and go throughout your day, and treat and interact with your schedule. Right. So, time audits minimum of two weeks.

Now, when you hear me say that you might be thinking; how the hell am I going to keep track of all of my time? Well, you're in luck. Today's the day for, like all the things in the show notes, apparently. But I created a timesheet that's broken down into 15-minute increments. I actually created this when I was still working in big law. And I've repurposed it, and I give it to my clients all the time.

It helps them keep track of their billable time, if they work in an environment where they have to keep track of their time. But it's also amazing for time

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audits. Okay, so that worksheet's broken down into 15-minute increments, and it helps you track how you're spending your time. Like I said, I'll drop the link to that in the show notes, so you can go download that worksheet if you want, and use that to conduct your time audit.

You also, if you join the next round of *The Less Stressed Lawyer* Mastermind, get whole binded notebooks of these worksheets, so you have them at your disposal. Now, if you're not inclined to go download that worksheet, that's okay, you can just keep track of your time on a blank sheet of paper, or on a note in your phone.

You might be tempted to keep track by using those app trackers that come on your phone automatically, that keep track of how long you use your app or monitor your screen time. I want you to resist the urge to use that, it's not as helpful as you think it is.

And the reason for that, partially, is that it only tells part of the story: A, it's only keeping track of your screen time. And B, I want you to gain the intel of when you're checking your phone; when you're on apps, when you're distracting yourself with some form of entertainment, versus doing your work or doing something else that you said you would be doing.

Just looking at the total numbers of time spent on certain apps, isn't going to give you all of that intel, so you're going to miss out on some really crucial information, that would help you course-correct and make better choices about how you spend your time, going forward.

We don't want to lose that, so I want you to do this manually. And doing this manually, just means that you're going to keep tabs on how you spend your minutes, and which minutes you spend, throughout the day. Right? Obviously, I know that you spend all of them. We all spend the full 24 hours each day. But I want you to know, when specifically, you're spending time doing particular activities. That's the information that I want you to glean.

Now, why do you want to do time audits? Why do you want to conduct them? Again, it's because we need to create and gain awareness around

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how you're actually depositing your time. I love to think about time, like an allowance, like with money, right. And as we go throughout our day, we're just making little deposits of that resource, of our time. So, you want to create awareness as to how you're depositing yours.

So many people don't realize where their time goes. Or, they're completely unaware of how they're actually spending it. They might think they're spending it one way, and it turns out, when we do a time audit, they actually aren't spending it that way, they're spending it doing other things.

We also constantly overestimate and underestimate when it comes to time. We tend to think that we can do certain things much faster than we can actually do them. So, we underestimate how long things take. We also underestimate how much time we spend doing, especially activities that don't serve us, we don't think that we spend as much time as we do.

Then, we also will think that some things take us longer than they actually do take. And that's when we're in a really avoidant pattern, we're assuming something is going to be so challenging, so difficult, and we avoid it. And then, when we finally force ourselves to do it, maybe out of fear, down the road, we're always surprised that it didn't take much time at all.

So, by doing a time audit, you gain a lot of awareness as to how exactly you're spending your time. You may not know, so we want to clean that up, and make sure that you know how you're spending it. And, we want to help you become better at estimating exactly how long things take. Because that's one of the reasons people constantly feel behind and really struggle with time management, they plan inaccurately.

Now, when you haven't done a time audit, you're really able to just go through your day-to-day life, pretty unaware of how you spend your time. And, you may not realize that there are certain things that you do that take up time throughout the day. And if you aren't planning for those things, those tasks, then you end up unintentionally double booking yourself, right? Which leads to a disaster, or to put it more mildly, it leads you to being behind schedule all the time.

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I want to give you a couple examples of this. And first, I just want to say that I used to be the queen of double booking myself. I used to work really long days, and I would plan about 24-hour's worth of work in about a 10-hour period.

Now, I didn't sit there and map out the math of it, right, it's not like I came up with the total number of hours that I needed to work in order to complete a task. Like, I came up with the number 24, and then tried to shove it into that 10-hour period. I just had a blank calendar and a to-do list a mile long.

And I just kept telling myself; I'll get it all done in this amount of time. Even though, that was a completely unrealistic plan, because the math just didn't work out. So, of course, when I did that, I was always setting myself up for failure.

Now, when I planned the 10 hours of work for the day, I also didn't leave any room for what I call humaning; eating lunch, grabbing coffee, using the restroom, talking to someone, checking my phone. Which, you don't need to be doing all day long, but you're probably going to do it once or twice, or a couple times throughout the day, right?

All of that stuff takes time. So, if you're planning 10 hours' worth of work in a 10-hour period, or better yet, 24 hours' worth of work in a 10-hour period, and you're not accounting for any time to human, you're really going to set yourself behind the clock, right? Because you are, in fact, going to do the things that are required of being human, like I just listed out.

So, if you're not planning for those, if you're not building that into your schedule, you're going to be double booking yourself. It's a recipe, again, for disaster and being really behind. Now, a couple other examples of double booking yourself or being unaware of how long something takes, and then planning poorly, accordingly.

A great example that I see all the time, are my clients who say they don't eat lunch. And maybe you don't eat lunch; I typically don't eat lunch, and I

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didn't eat lunch all that frequently in some of my past legal jobs. But with that being said, I encounter a lot of people who actually do eat lunch, they just don't eat a lengthy lunch, or at least that's what they tell themselves.

They're like; oh, I just grabbed something, and I eat at my desk. And when we do a time audit together, I always ask them to really pay close attention to how long that takes. Because they never account any time for it. So, if you're telling yourself; oh, I'm going to work on that motion, or I'm going to work on that draft of a contract, or I'm going to send emails from 12-1 and it's going to take me about an hour.

And you also plan to eat lunch during that time, even if you eat at your desk, here's what's happening. Your lunch still takes a few minutes, at minimum, to prepare. Normally, it's more minutes than you think it is. And you can't really multitask. So, you can't eat and type at the same time. You have to be shifting your attention from one thing to the other. And every time you shift your attention, you're losing time.

So, you're trying to do two things within the same exact timeframe, and of course, that's not possible. So, your minutes are going to be pushed back, you're going to find yourself starting to fall behind. People also do this when they plan their schedules, and they don't factor in all of the time they spend on reading and responding to emails, right.

So, I was guilty of this too, I'd plan 10 hours' worth of "substantive work", which for me, as a litigator, was like in Microsoft Word™ or in Westlaw™, either drafting or researching. And I wouldn't take into account, that every day, I probably spent at least an hour, at a bare minimum an hour, oftentimes two to three hours, just reading and responding to emails.

So, you need to factor that in to your schedule. If you don't, now you're trying to fit the eight hours that you planned plus three hours for email, into eight hours. Instead of planning 11 hours' worth of work, or better yet, 11 hours in a 12-hour time period, to leave room for that humaning time. Right. If you do it any other way, you're unconsciously double booking yourself.

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So, when we're doing a time audit, I often have my clients keep very specific, detailed account of how much time they spend emailing, reading emails, responding to emails. We need to get a general sense of how much time you devote to that activity, so you can build it into your plan and avoid double booking yourself.

And, you will probably be surprised to see how much time email takes up for you every single day. A lot of the substantive work that people do, is sending and receiving email. That's just the work world that we live in, nowadays. So, you want to make sure that you're really conscious and aware of exactly how much time it takes you every day. So, you can bake that into the scheduling cake. All right.

Another big time suck, that people tend to be a little blind to, is how much time they spend talking to people, like co-workers, colleagues, clients, things like that, that they are not accounting for, okay? You also want to see if your meetings actually go as long as you say they're gonna go.

If you're calendaring them, and then you're accounting for time right after to be used for something else, but you, when you conduct a time audit, start to learn that your meetings always go long. Instead of a half an hour, they normally always end up taking an hour, that doesn't have to be a problem, you just really want to know that. You want to know that your meetings take an hour, so you can plan very accurately.

Same thing with some of those buffering activities. You may not realize how much time you engage in that behavior, like scrolling on Instagram® in the morning, while you're lying in bed, because you don't really feel like getting ready for work and getting up for the day. Right, you're avoiding all of the things that you have to do. So, you just start to scroll.

And when you're confronted with the amount of time, when you see it written down on paper, and you see when, in your day, you do that. And you start to think about how you could have spent that time instead, it's really hard to keep ignoring the problem. So, we want to create a lot of awareness, by conducting a time audit.

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Now, when you do this, you will probably be really floored and learn a ton about yourself. It will start to make sense why you have the exact results with time management and your workload that you do. Based on the activities that you engage in, and the activities that you don't engage in right; two sides to that coin.

Now, you can start to see why you might want to do a time audit. It's going to create all of this awareness. You won't be able to hide from yourself. You will start to gain data and information, in order to make more informed decisions about how you deposit your time in the future. So, there's a lot of great stuff that comes out of doing a time audit.

Regardless, people typically hate completing them. I've watched my clients resist doing this, at all costs. And maybe that's you, maybe you can totally relate to that. Maybe, as I'm talking about doing a time audit, and you hear me recommending it, suggesting, and breaking it down; how it is that you do it, how specific you want to be with it, you might be thinking to yourself; no way, Jose, I'm absolutely not doing this.

And if that's you, let's talk about it, okay. Because you're really missing out on all of the incredible value that you gain when you conduct a time audit. So, here are some of the reasons people resist completing this exercise. And then, why you want to make sure that you aren't one of them, that you don't resist completing this exercise.

First and foremost, people resist conducting time audits because they tell themselves that they don't have the time to do it. All right, which is always a lie, we always have the time. Because we make choices with how we spend our time. Time doesn't happen to us; we choose how we spend and deposit our time.

So, you do have the time, telling yourself that you don't is simply inaccurate, it's a lie. That being said, telling yourself that you don't have the time is a very effective way to avoid doing a time audit. So, if you don't want to do one, that's going to sound really reasonable to you. And listen, I get it.

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You're probably coming to this episode, and to this topic of time management, generally pretty stressed, and overwhelmed, and anxious, and feeling behind, and pressured, and rushed. So, it's gonna be hard to devote extra time to another task, right?

But I want to encourage you, that you actually don't have time to *not* do this. Because you keep squandering so much of your time with bad time management practices, that we need to clear that up, we need to clean that up. And the way to do that, the fastest way to do that, is to get really clear on how long things take you, and how you're currently choosing to spend your time. All right.

You also might think that it will take too long to do. I see that with a lot of my clients. They're like; oh, it's gonna take me forever. I have to write everything down. It'll take me basically all day. Lies, again. No, it won't. You don't need to write *War and Peace* descriptions of how you spend your time. You just need like a one-word statement, or at the most, a phrase, you don't even need a complete sentence. Okay?

This isn't billable time narratives here. It's just something that will jog your memory, where you'll be able to look at it and you'll know exactly how you spent that time. Okay? So, keep it simple, specific, but short, don't indulge in syncing time into this activity, or telling yourself that it's going to take too long, when it doesn't have to. Because if you're telling yourself that it's going to take too long, you're going to have a ton of resistance to doing this.

You also, will create resistance for yourself, if you tell yourself that this is a tedious task, okay? Who cares if it's tedious? First of all, tedious is subjective. So, that's an opinion, that's just a thought and you can choose to change it. You can also just decide the tedious isn't a problem.

Tedious is a good thing here. We want to be tedious because we want to gain all that amazing information, all that intel, to make better informed decisions going forward. So, you can course-correct and better manage your time.

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Another reason people have resistance to conducting time audits, is that they're telling themselves that it's not going to make a difference. Why would they keep track of their time, if they're still going to manage it the exact same way after they keep track of it? They think that's what's going to happen; that nothing's going to change.

I promise you, if you become painfully aware of how you're depositing your time every day, and you're currently struggling with time management, you're gonna have to face the hard truth of how you spend time. And that truth alone, gaining that awareness, in and of itself, will force you to course correct. Maybe not 100%, but probably pretty significantly. So, just gaining this awareness can be life changing, super transformative.

Now, if you're telling yourself that it won't make a difference if you conduct this time audit, I implore you to just give it a try and see what happens before you come to that judgment. Remember what I told you several episodes ago. That in order to tackle the three P's; people-pleasing, perfectionism, and procrastination, that I needed you to be three things. And those were being resourceful, patient, and coachable. This is where that kicks in and comes into play.

I need you to be resourceful, patient, and coachable. And specifically coachable here, because I'm telling you to do something, and you might have resistance to doing it. And I am on your side, I'm always on your side. I always want what serves you, what gets you where you want to go. I promise you time audits are the way for you to get where you want to go, when it comes to time management.

So, take a deep breath and find that coachability within yourself, and just try on this exercise. Just try on the possibility that I might be on to something, that I might have experience with this that you don't yet have. That I might know something that you don't yet know. Just trust and have a little bit of faith. Okay.

Now, the other reason that people absolutely hate this exercise, is because conducting this exercise forces you to confront the reality of how you spend

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your time. And for most people, that really triggers their perfectionism. It goes into direct conflict with their perfectionistic preferences, right? You want to be hitting the nail on the head with how you manage your time. And then, when you keep track of it, you are confronted with the harsh reality that you're not managing it all that well, right.

And you probably, intellectually know that, but seeing it written down on paper is a whole other story, right? It's a hard pill to swallow. It's a hard truth that you get confronted with. Now, it's a catalyst. It's super impactful doing this, but it does force you to confront reality, and it will trigger your perfectionism.

It's going to conjure up feelings of guilt, of shame, of inadequacy, of disappointment in yourself. And as humans, our natural inclination to those emotions, is to do a couple different things: Either bury our head in the sand, or busy ourselves with doing something else, rather than slowing down, getting curious, and taking a good hard look at how you're spending your time.

But here's what we don't do here: We don't bury our heads in the sand. That's not a thing. We take full, radical ownership over our behavior, over our choices. That is what is required for you to live a more fulfilling, more intentional life. You've got to own the choices that you're making. All right.

Now, the only way to fully own how you deposit your time. is to keep track of how you spend it. There's no other way around it. If you want to take full ownership and course-correct we've got to confront reality. And confronting reality looks like keeping track of how you spend every minute of your day, again, for at least a minimum of two weeks.

Now, this exercise is going to be uncomfortable for you, probably. That is okay. That's actually a huge part of learning how to master time management. You have to be willing to feel uncomfortable, and do things in spite of and despite the discomfort. You have to be willing to do things that you don't want to do.

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You get to start building that skill set, building that ability to do things that you don't want to do, by conducting these time audits, every day for at least two weeks, all right. Track your time, every single minute of it. Figure out when you wake up, how long it takes you to get ready, when you start work, how much time you spend working, how much time you spend not working, how much time you spend relaxing, and how much time you spend sleeping, and everything else in between.

Figure out how long you spent in meetings, or on emails, or working on big projects. Figure out where, in your day, your productivity really drops off. Figure out how long it takes you to simply be a human every day, and where you're losing track of time, or where you're not accounting for things that take time. Where you're double booking yourself, unconsciously.

I want you to keep track of all of that, we want to know it all; all the professional parts and all of the personal parts. So, we can start to piece together what your life looks like, as far as time is concerned. From there, once we have that intel, once we've gained and created that awareness, we can start making more informed decisions about how we deposit our time, we can start to plan accurately. And that's one of the steps, to the three-step process, that I teach on how to manage your time.

All right, so that's your homework this week: I want you to go to the show notes, download the worksheet, and start keeping track of how you spend your time. We're going to do this exercise for two weeks, because we're not done talking about time management, yet. But get started now, gain some intel, start learning about yourself, how you spend time, what you do, what you don't do, where the train starts to fall off the track.

Gain all of that information, and then we'll take that information, and we'll figure out a game plan moving forward, in order to course-correct. All right. So, you can get started on that now, and we'll keep going as you work through conducting the time audit.

Remember, if you're in a ton of resistance, that's okay. You can do uncomfortable things. You will survive it, it'll be fine. Just gag and go

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through the discomfort and complete these time audits anyways. Doing this exercise will blow your mind and change your life. I assure you.

All right. That's what I have for you this week. I hope you have a beautiful week, and I'll talk to you in the next episode.

Thanks for listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast. If you want more info about Olivia Vizachero or the show's notes and resources from today's episode, visit www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com.