

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (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 30. Today, we're going to set the foundation for managing your time. 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 overwhelmed 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.

Hey there. How's it going today? I hope you are well, and I hope that you have taken me up on my invitation, that I talked about in the last episode, to start doing time audits. As we continue on in this time management series, I hope you take the opportunity to dive in and really gain all that awareness that I talked about, when I talked about how to do time audits and why you want to do them, and the benefit of that.

So, I hope you're up to your eyeballs keeping track of how you're spending your time and gaining a ton of awareness, as a result. I hope they're going well. One of my clients in my mastermind actually asked me a question about time audits in our session this week. And she was just asking, like for some more specificity on how exactly to do them. And I gave an example of the awareness and the benefits you would get from doing a time audit, and how it would help you plan going forward the next time you do something.

And, the example that I used was travel. So, because I've done time audits with travel, I now know, to work backwards from when my flight's gonna leave, and how far in advance they start to board, and how much time it takes me to get through security, and how early I want to be through security before the flight starts boarding. I tend to cut it pretty close, but I do like to leave enough time so I'm not rushing.

I keep track of how long it's gonna take me to check my bag at the curb. How long it's gonna take me, even if there's a little bit of traffic, to get from my house to the airport. So, when you're doing a time audit, you're keeping

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

track of all of those little micro expenditures of time and how they add up together, so you can stay on track and stay on schedule. So you can better manage your time.

Speaking of travel, I've got a ton of it coming up. One of my clients told me recently he was like, you're gonna be like *Carmen Sandiego*. Because I seriously am bouncing all over the globe, or at least parts of it. I'm going to be in New York City, I can't wait. I get to see two people that I've never met in person, and I'm really excited to see them. One is a former client, and the other is a friend of mine that I met through LinkedIn® and I've never met her before.

And, we talk on the phone for hours each week. And we've never seen each other in person, so that's super exciting. And, I'm flying through New York because I'm on my way to Italy. And I couldn't get a direct flight from Detroit, so I had to pick New York or Boston. And I have people to see in New York, so I'm going to spend a few days in New York City and then, I'm going to head to Rome.

And then, I'm going to the Amalfi Coast. And then, super exciting, I'm going to fly from Italy to Nashville, where I'm speaking at Clio Con. If you are going to Clio Con, reach out to me and let me know that you're going to be there. I would love to meet you in person. So, I'll be in Nashville for Clio Con, that's October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>.

And if you've decided to go at the very last minute, and you haven't gotten your tickets yet, go to my Instagram®, my handle's *thelessstressedlawyer*. And click on the link in my bio, and you can get a discounted ticket to Clio Con if you do that. So, that's available to you too. But if you're going to be there, or you're on the fence about going, definitely go in person, it's so much more fun to get to see everyone and meet face-to-face.

And, I love soaking up an immersive environment. That is what I love about my own mastermind. With my clients, we meet in person. twice a year. And we get to soak up all the goodness and just be in a really collaborative,

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

immersive, all-consuming space, and really focus on the personal development. I love that part of it. So, if you're going to Clio con reach out. I'll be there, in Nashville, speaking all about, actually, this topic: How to make the most of your time.

And then after that, I'm going to hop on over to Charleston to scope out some hotels for the next live event, for *The Less Stressed Lawyer* mastermind. So, that's where the next event is going to be. And, I can't wait. Charleston; such an amazing city.

So, I'm going to be there, and I'm going to bop around and check out the places that I want to have the welcome dinner, the farewell dinner, and where I want to actually host the event. I want to compare some venues; more on that later. But that's my travel.

So, as you're listening to these next couple episodes, I'll be bouncing all around the globe, again, like *Carmen Sandiego*. All right. So, we're continuing on in this time management series, right? We've been talking about the three P's.

Now we've really dove in to start talking about procrastination, and how to manage your time. We talked about the two models of time management: firefighting and procrastinating. We talked about your thoughts about time, and your to-do list and work in general, and time management. We also talked about doing time audits, to start to gain some of that awareness.

Now, I was gonna dive right in to the three steps that I teach my clients on how to manage their time. The three steps that they need to implement in order to do that effectively. But I realized I want to set just a little bit more of a foundation before we dive in to discussing each of those three steps. So, that's the purpose of this episode.

It's gonna be pretty short and sweet, but I wanted to make sure that I covered that. There are just a few other things that I wanted to talk to you about before we dive in deep to each one of the three steps.

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

Alright, the first thing that I want to talk about is always being behind. The problem of always being behind. And the reason that I want to talk about that is because it's probably one of the most common problems that I see my clients face. They come to me, and they say, "Olivia, I'm always behind. I feel like I'm never on top of things. I'm never caught up. I'm always late on stuff. There's always stuff that I've promised to people that is behind schedule," right?

They're just constantly behind day after day. So much so that they find themselves waking up first thing in the morning, and the way that they're talking to themselves, they're telling themselves that they're already behind. Their eyes just popped open, it's first thing in the morning, and yet they're already believing that they're behind. Right.

And what they're doing, the reason this is happening, is because they're treating their behind, like rollover minutes. If anyone remembers rollover minutes from the early days of the cell phone, back in the 2000's, it's kind of like that, right? It's, we're carrying, also, like miles or PTO (paid time off). We carry it over into the next month or the next year.

Well, people were doing the same thing with being behind. They didn't get through everything that they planned for the day on Monday, so they wake up on Tuesday morning, and they're telling themselves that they're already behind.

We also start our weeks like this. If we told ourselves we were going to work over the weekend, and then you didn't, you procrastinated, you did something else instead, you wake up Monday morning and you already feel like you're behind the eight ball, right?

And why is that a problem? Well, number one, it feels terrible, right? If you're telling yourself you're constantly behind, you're gonna feel really discouraged and have this heaviness that you start your day with. That's no way to start your day. And it's going to create so much more resistance to

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

you getting started, and to you accomplishing work, and having a really productive day. So, it's not going to serve you.

It's also, not true. And I know if you hear me say that you're probably going to be like, "Olivia, I disagree with you. It is true." It's not, it's just a matter of opinion. And you get to tell yourself, you get to have the opinion, that you're behind at the start of every day, or you get to decide that every day is a new day. Right?

Think about it. Telling yourself you're behind first thing in the morning doesn't make sense. Whatever happened yesterday, happened yesterday. Whatever happened last week, happened last week. All right. Every day, you wake up and you start a fresh day. You get the opportunity to make a new plan for a new day. So, why would you tell yourself that you're behind?

You would just start fresh, and anything that didn't get accomplished the day before you now factor in and put it into today's plan. You get a new plan; you get a fresh start. You're not behind. You're only behind first thing in the morning, if you decide to tell yourself that you are. And again, I highly recommend you don't do this, it's going to make you feel terrible.

Now, what I teach my clients, is the only time you can ever be behind is at the end of a day. Right? You made a plan for the day, and then, you didn't get through all of it. So, at the end of the day, it makes sense that you feel behind.

Now when that happens, most people want to beat themselves up for being behind. They want to kick themselves, they want to start that negative self-talk, and really gang up on themselves, and have that inner dialogue get really negative, right? If you've been listening to this podcast for a while, you know that that doesn't lead to anything productive.

Negative thoughts create negative results because they make you feel badly. And then, you're really prone to take negative action or no action at

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

all, when you're feeling those negative emotions. Which ultimately, produces nothing good.

So, instead of beating up on yourself when you're behind at the end of the day, I just want you to get really curious and do a quick evaluation. There are only ever three reasons that you're behind. And it may be that you are experiencing a combination of the three. That happens sometimes; that's alright. You just want to know what the three are, so that you can evaluate really effectively and gain some awareness.

And then, troubleshoot, problem-solve, for what happened, what went wrong, what didn't work that day, that led to you being behind. So, the three reasons that you're always behind: Number one, you're just doing the math wrong. You're packing what I like to call 10 pounds of potatoes into a 5-pound bag. So, you're planning about 10 hours of work in a five-hour period. Or, 20 hours of work in an 8-hour period.

You're not making time assessments for how long what you've planned for the day, will take you. So, you just plan too much work. Which, if you're doing that, of course, you're going to be behind at the end of the day; the math didn't work out. You're not going to be able to do 15 hours' worth of work in 7 hours. That's just not how time works; it's not how math works.

So, that's gonna be the first reason that you're behind at the end of the day. You've simply done the math wrong and planned too much for the amount of time that you allotted yourself.

The second reason, that you're going to feel behind at the end of the day, is because you reshuffled. So, maybe you planned the appropriate amount of work, you planned eight hours for eight hours. Or, more realistically probably, because it takes a little bit of time throughout the day to be a human, you planned seven hours or seven and a half hours for an eight-hour period.

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

So, that should fit, that should work, right, in theory. But if you reshuffle and you take a detour from the plan, you divert from the plan, that's going to make you be behind at the end of every day, right? If you take unscheduled calls, if you answer emails when you didn't plan to be answering emails, if you're doing all of those things.

You're letting a colleague come into your office and spend 30 minutes kind of talking about work, but also just making small talk when you were supposed to be working on something else, you're going to be behind. So, you've reshuffled your schedule, and everything that you had planned for the day got pushed down, right? That's the second way that you're going to be behind at the end of the day.

And the third way, that you're going to be behind at the end of the day, is simply if you procrastinate. So, you planned maybe, an appropriate amount of work, but you just aren't doing it; you are buffering. You're doing those actions that I talked about a couple episodes ago.

You're scrolling on Instagram, maybe you're texting friends, you're listening to music, you're messing around on the internet, maybe reading ESPN.com™, or the news, right? Maybe you're grabbing a snack, watching some Netflix®, you're just doing anything that you didn't plan for, in order to avoid work.

So, those are the three reasons that you would end up being behind at the end of the day. And like I said, you might be guilty of a combination of them. But you just want to know if you're doing any of those things. If you're engaged in any of those behaviors, and that they're contributing to being behind. If you are engaged in any of those behind-making activities, for lack of a better term, you want to know, so you can course correct, right?

If you're guilty of the first offense, by planning too much, you're going to start planning accurately, and doing the math right. If you're guilty of reshuffling, you want to stop reshuffling. You want to stop doing that and just stick to your plan.

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

And if you're procrastinating, of course, you want to not do that. You want to get started and make your way through the work that you planned for the day. So, you don't get to the end of the day feeling behind, and not having gotten through what you planned to accomplish for the day.

Now, if you constantly feel like you're behind, this probably isn't going to be a problem that we remedy overnight. It's going to take some trial and error; it's going to take some practice. You're going to stumble, you're going to have missteps, you're gonna make mistakes. And, all of that is going to be a learning opportunity.

You've heard me say it before, that I really don't believe in failure. As long as you don't quit, you can't really fail. So instead, you're really going to be existing in this world where you're just winning or learning, winning, or learning. And that's how I want you to approach time management.

It's going to take some time. You're going to get a little bit better each day, if you're evaluating what's working, evaluating what's not working, and making a plan for what you'll do differently to fix what doesn't work. So, you can start doing that evaluation process, that process of taking action, auditing, and adapting, when it comes to being behind and trying to remedy that problem.

The other thing you want to do though, is get really clear on what you mean by "not being behind". Most people really don't know what they're aiming for. We use terms pretty loosely, like, we're behind or we want to be caught up, right? Everyone or most people, I shouldn't make that big of a generalization, but most people I work with and most people I know are constantly striving to, "get caught up".

And, what do you mean by get caught up, if that's the way that you speak? If that's the thing that you're aiming for, that's the result that you're trying to create in your life, when it comes to managing your time. Let's get really clear on that.

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

I used to speak that way, too. I was always aiming to be caught up. And I finally forced myself one day, to answer the question of; what did I mean by that? What would it look like for me to be caught up? And, I allowed myself to be really honest with the answer that I came up with. I was just very candid.

And it's funny, speaking of candor, I was talking to a client earlier today. And I said, one of the ways that you get really great at time management, is that you just start having very candid, honest conversations with yourself. You really eliminate all the white lies, all the fibs that you might be used to telling yourself, about how you spend your time, about how you manage it, about what you're going to do, and about what you're not going to do.

You just really want to start to engage in the most honest conversations around expenditures of time that you possibly can. So, I want you to get really honest. What do you mean when you say you want to be caught up? What would that look like for you?

When I allowed myself to answer that question really honestly, what I meant by being caught up, was that I wanted to be done with everything. And I joked once, and I told a client of mine that, and I think her response to me was like, “Does that mean like your dead, like six feet under?” Because that's kind of what it means to be done with everything, right?

Other than that, there's always going to be more for us to do. We're always going to have outstanding items on our to do list, things to take care of tomorrow. We're never really gonna be “caught up”, where we're done with everything. But a lot of people, when they're using that phrase, they're kind of in the back of their head aiming for that.

And what's funny is, as soon as I described being caught up in that manner, I realized I don't even want that. Because it would mean that I have no work to do tomorrow. I have no clients to meet with. I wouldn't have any money coming in. And as someone who's self-employed, that would be a nightmare, right?

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

Same thing goes for a lot of people who are working a billable-hour model; you want more work on the horizon. You don't want to have an empty day tomorrow, with nothing on your to-do list and no work to bill for. So, you want to get really clear with; what do you mean by caught up? And number one, is your answer even really desirable? Do you want to be done with everything if that's what you mean by it?

Or, two, is it even possible? And when you think about the practice of law, you're probably never going to be caught up. It's not like working... I'm from Detroit, and we've got the big three here, the automotive companies. And if you work in a factory, and you're responsible for putting engines together every day, right?

The engines, part by part, are going to be assembled on the assembly line. And, it's one person's job to put the bolts into this section of the engine. And, it's another person's job to assemble another part of the engine. And, you're going to do that over the course of your shift. And then, you're done for the day, when your shift comes to an end. And, there's no more work to do until your next shift.

The practice of law is really not like that, right? There's going to be unfinished work at the end of your day. So, I like to introduce people to a third way to talk about time; there's being behind, there's being on schedule, and then, there's being caught up.

Being caught up would be where you're done with everything; there's nothing left for you to do. Being on schedule is a little bit different than that; you're still going to have outstanding items coming due in the future. You're not behind on them, yet. They're not late; they're due at some time up ahead, but you still have work to do, right? It's not like you don't have anything on your to-do list.

That's what it would look like to be on schedule. And then, of course, when you're behind, it's going to be either at the end of the day when you committed any of the three mistakes that I mentioned earlier: the causes for

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

being behind. Or, you're going to be behind on something that you already promised to someone. And if that's the case, I just want to offer you; you can create a fresh start for yourself on everything that you're behind on.

And I highly encourage you to do that, so you can get out of this narrative that you're constantly behind. Make a list of everything that you've already promised people, and set new internal deadlines for yourself. If you need to communicate external deadlines, with clients or supervisors that you work with or other colleagues, whatever the case may be, set new deadlines.

And make them realistic, push them out far ahead of you, so you can work towards them. And, get out of that state of constantly being behind just because there are deadlines that you previously missed, that you're carrying with you, that are looming with you, right?

So, you can get out of behind that way, and then, you're just dealing with that end of the day behind, from bad planning, reshuffling, or from procrastinating.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about what I call the “catching up conundrum”, or the “caught up conundrum”. And it's this phenomenon that I see people bring with them, that they picked up from school, right? Think about high school, college, law school, any of that, you would get, essentially, like an outline or a syllabus for the semester.

And you'd be able to figure out whether you were behind schedule, whether you were caught up, or you could even get ahead of schedule, right? Because you could look ahead. You could read ahead if you wanted to. Complete assignments early or ahead of time, but you always knew exactly where you were, with respect to the schedule for the class, for that semester.

And then, the semester would culminate in some final project. And then, there's a nice tidy little bow that would be put on that semester, it would

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

conclude, and then you'd get a fresh start shortly thereafter. Now, the kicker here, is that school's an artificial environment, right?

So, your professors don't come to you two days before your tort's exam, while you're cramming, and say, "Hey, I really need you to stop what you're doing. I'm not going to move the exam, but before you finish studying for my exam, I need you to write a term paper, or do this draft motion for something," right? They don't do that.

You're in this artificial bubble, protected from any of those infringements from the outside world. You have a concrete schedule of what's going to be expected of you, and that's all you have to think about. There are no infringements, nothing unplanned pops up to interrupt your schedule, to interrupt the plan that you've created for yourself. You're really existing in this finite world of to-do list items.

And that is just completely contrary to the practice of law. To what it looks like to have a career and be working within your career. They're just different beasts. With your career, it's not that open-closed, tidy, little bow finality, and then fresh start scenario that we're used to. Instead, it's the world of spinning plates, right?

You have a to-do list, from day one of your career. And you keep adding to it and some things drop off, and then some things add on. And most people like to refer to to-do lists as 'never ending'. I think that has a negative connotation, so I don't love that terminology.

Instead, I like to think of your to-do list as ever evolving, because that's exactly what it is. You're going to work through parts of your to-do list each and every day. You're going to scratch some things off as you conclude certain tasks, and you're going to add some more stuff. Because as you complete some work, you're going to have new assignments, new cases will come to you, new matters will come to you.

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

You might do a particular task on a matter, and it opens the door for a couple follow-up items that you need to take care of. So, that to-do list is going to be ever evolving. And, you're never going to reach the end of a day where you're completely done with everything.

So, if that's what you're aiming for, when it comes to being caught up, that sense of completion. If that's what you're chasing, in order to get that same sense of relief, or satisfaction, or accomplishment, that you're used to getting from school; I hate to be the one to break this to you. But you're just not going to get that from your career.

That's not how the program is set up. You're going to have that to-do list that's constantly evolving, and you're going to constantly have things on it that are coming up, that aren't complete yet. So, if you're seeking that sense of completion, you're going to be pretty dissatisfied. You're going to be underwhelmed at the end of every day, if you're looking for that tidy, little bow.

Knowing that, you can start to shift your expectations. You can decide that that's not what you're aiming for anymore. Instead, you're just looking to make a plan for the day, and get through the plan for the day. Not be behind at the end of the day, and have more to do tomorrow. But have that not be a problem. You're not trying to get through everything to get that sense of finality.

The faster you make peace with the fact that you're not going to be “caught up”, as in done with everything, and that you're not going to have that sense of completion, and that there's always going to be more to do tomorrow, the faster you are going to enjoy your career.

You're going to dial down the pressure and the overwhelm significantly, because you're not going to be chasing something that really is unattainable, right? You're going to be much more realistic about what you can accomplish, and that's going to allow you to feel more accomplished at the end of each day.

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

Now, once you've made peace with the fact that there's no such thing as really being caught up, as in done with everything, in the practice of law, I also want you to start to make peace with time. And that's really the purpose of those time audits, right? Is to get a clear picture of how much you can get done in a given day.

If you're constantly behind, you want to evaluate why are you behind? Are you planning inaccurately? Are you reshuffling? Or, are you procrastinating? And then, solve for that. What do you need to do differently, in order to make sure you remedy each of those missteps, each of those mistakes, each of those time management faux pas?

All right, you're going to have to get brutally honest with yourself, about how much you can accomplish in a given day. And I will tell you, most of my clients tend to be pretty mad at time. They wish it was a lot different than it was. They wish they could get a lot more done in a given time period, than they can actually get done.

So, they tend to be a little disappointed and a little underwhelmed, by what they can get done in a certain number of hours. The faster you accept what you can actually get done in a day, the faster you're going to make managing your time so much easier on yourself. The better you're going to get at managing your time so much faster.

Because you're not lying to yourself about what you can accomplish in a specific time period. You're making peace with time, you're accepting it, for what it is, for being how it is. That's what I want you to do.

Now, once you've done that, once you've recognized that you might have been trapped in the catch-up conundrum and you get out of it, you define what it means to be caught up, or better yet, on schedule for you. And, you stop beating yourself up about constantly being behind.

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

And, you start to reframe your thinking around what causes being behind, and what it means to be behind, and what it looks like to be behind. And, you stop doing those rollover minutes when it comes to being behind.

What do we do next? Well, that's when we really start going to work and mastering the three steps to managing your time. All right, and here's what those three steps are:

In order to manage your time, you need to control your calendar. Or, for most people, you need to reclaim control over your calendar. All right, and I'm going to teach you how to do that in the next episode.

The second step to managing your time, is planning your schedule accurately.

And then the third step to managing your time, is honoring that plan; that schedule that you set for yourself. And in order to honor the plan, you're going to have to start work on time, work without interruptions, and end on time.

I'm going to do a deep dive into each of these three steps, over the course of the next three episodes. I'm going to teach you exactly what you need to do to reclaim control of your calendar. I'm going to teach you exactly what you need to do, in order to plan your schedule accurately. And then, we're going to really talk at length, about what you need to do to honor the plans that you make. All right?

If you follow these three steps, you will manage your time effectively. All right, it doesn't need to be more complicated than this. I work with a lot of clients who come to me and they're like, "Hey, I heard I need to separate my to-do list items into urgent tasks versus important tasks. And which one's both?" And that, I just think it's so complicated.

Most of my clients think all of their work is both; it's both urgent and important. And I think that just adds one more thing on your to-do list that

## Ep #30: Setting the Foundation for Managing Your Time (Time Management Series)

gets in the way of you doing your work. So, we want to eliminate that. And we're just going to create this framework. Follow these three simple steps to managing your time: reclaiming control of your calendar, planning your schedule accurately, and honoring the plan.

We'll dive into each one, like I said, over the course of the next three episodes. All right. So, stay tuned for those. Make sure you're subscribed to the podcast, so you don't miss any of those tips that are coming out over the course of the next three episodes. All right.

That's what I've got for you this week. I hope you have a beautiful week, my friends. 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](http://www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com).