

How Can I Be More Successful, Efficient and Content In My Legal Career?

(This is the first part of a three-part series. The author is one of five lawyers in Alabama in private practice who were recently appointed to the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism.)

In searching for answers to the question posed above, I recently sought the counsel of ten of Alabama's best lawyers, asking them three questions:

- Describe one activity that has helped you be more successful in your legal career.
- Describe one activity that helps you manage time better.
- Describe one activity that helps you be more content in your legal career.

Each lawyer answered each question. The lawyers surveyed were **Karon Bowdre** (former law professor, federal district judge, Birmingham); **Ken Simon** (former circuit judge, civil practitioner, Birmingham); **Jere Beasley** (civil practitioner, Montgomery); **Robert Cunningham** (civil practitioner, Mobile); **Gorman Houston** (former Alabama Supreme Court Justice, appellate practitioner, Birmingham); **Ken Randall** (former civil practitioner, University of Alabama School of Law Dean, Tuscaloosa); **Bobby Segall** (civil practitioner, state bar president, Montgomery); **Sonja Bivens** (former civil practitioner, federal magistrate judge, Mobile); **Patrick Tuten** (criminal lawyer, Huntsville); and **Susan Conlon** (family practice lawyer, Huntsville).

Three of the lawyers are women and two are African-American. Each lawyer received his or her law license at least eight years ago. Six lawyers are in private practice, three are in public service and one is a law school dean.

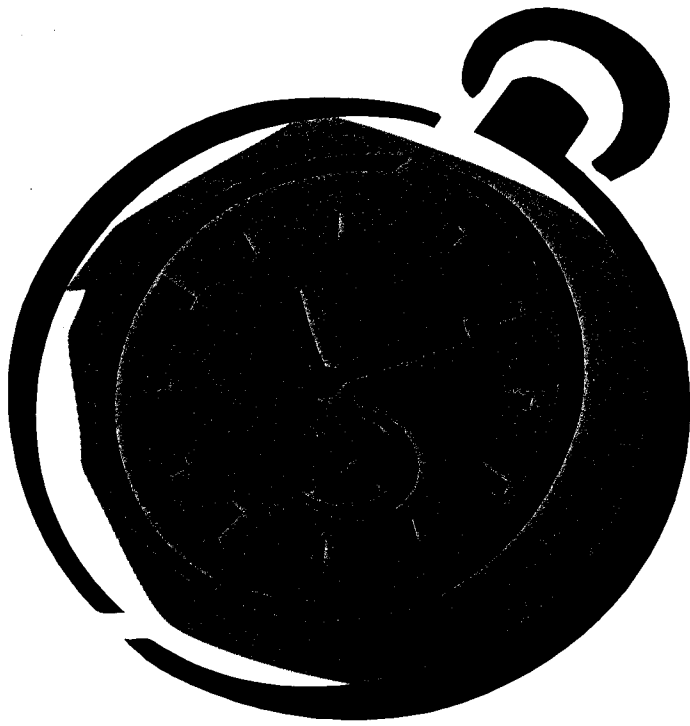
A. How To Be More Successful In My Legal Career

The answers received were:

1. Committing my legal career to God and seeking to honor Him.
2. Prayer and meditation.
3. Physical fitness—working out. Energy! Endurance!
4. Taking only the cases of which you can be proud.
5. Always being willing to seek the direction and advice of other attorneys when in doubt.
6. Involvement with the legal community. I have solicited advice and counsel from those lawyers and judges with more experience than I. I have made myself available to less experienced lawyers. I treat others with respect.
7. My former law firm required all partners to develop and submit a personal business plan that detailed our professional goals for the coming year, and the steps that we would undertake to reach our goals. Today, I continue to engage in this exercise, but have also begun to incorporate goals for personal growth as well.
8. Spending the extra time necessary to be overly prepared for a trial or other court appearances. In the long run, I believe it has caused me to have better outcomes than I otherwise should have.
9. I believe growing up in a small town and dealing with folks from all walks of life have been extremely helpful to me in the practice of law.
10. Lots of reading about current events, history, politics and business. It has given me a broader perspective on the world and has enabled me to see the “big picture” and put my work in context.

Next issue: "How to Better Manage My Time"

—Samuel N. Crosby, Daphne



How Can I Be More Successful, Efficient And Content in My Legal Career, Part 2

How to Better Manage My Time

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The following are the answers I received:

1. Use "to-do" lists.

2. Manage the phone and do not let it manage you.
3. Have a good staff to help move matters along.
4. Delegate, delegate, delegate.
5. Retain the right secretary.
6. Raise [or spend time with] kids—they help keep your priorities straight, [know] what's important. They keep you laughing at yourself. You work efficiently so you can be with them. Even their struggles help you know what's important.
7. I am a big believer in to-do lists and knowing that, as my dearly departed father used to say, "It doesn't matter how well you can do something if you shouldn't be doing it in the first place." In other words, I delegate those tasks that should be handled by others. I concentrate on the practice of law. I also try to keep one afternoon each week free of appointments so that I can tie up as many loose ends as possible.
8. Work on most matters with another lawyer in the firm. Often, when I have a complex matter of law to argue to a court, I ask another lawyer in the firm to research and write about the issue and then discuss with me every argument both for and against our position.
9. I generally try to spend one and a half to two hours of quiet time on the weekend planning for my upcoming week. I typically draft a to-do list so that when I reach the office on Monday, I am focused and organized rather than jumping from project to project, without accomplishing anything.
10. I have always been highly organized and have had no problem managing time at any stage of my career. I inherited that trait from my parents.

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—Samuel N. Crosby, Daphne