

Top 8 low-tech 'life hacks' for lawyers

A list of life hacks which are geared specifically toward the needs of attorneys

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* This article first appeared in Inside Counsel Magazine on October 1, 2014: <http://bit.ly/1vvaWbZ>

A “life hack” is a tip or technique that helps one to meet an everyday need more effectively or efficiently. Examples of life hacks include: 1) To stop receiving unwanted marketing email, filter by the word “unsubscribe.” 2) Rub toothpaste on your headlights to clear the glass. 3) If your car is stuck in sand or snow, take your floor mats out and put them under the front of your tires to gain traction. Tips such as these can really come in handy. Therefore, we thought it might be beneficial to create a list of life hacks which are geared specifically toward the needs of attorneys. We hope they prove to be useful.

1. Put a sticky note on your monitor that says, “Count to ten before you click send!”

Posting this little jingle on your computer will remind you to take a moment to reflect before sending an email. Were you thinking clearly when you wrote that message? Because if you were tired, upset or in a rush, you might have written something you may later regret. Emails that are written in anger or haste can contain admissions, exaggerations or threats that make for wonderful exhibits for opposing counsel.

Pro-tip: If you use Microsoft Outlook, remember that you can actually recall emails within the first 10 seconds of sending. Just open up the same message, click on “Actions” in the top toolbar, then “Recall This Message...” from the drop-down menu. If done correctly, the server will confirm if the email was recalled successfully.

2. Tape one of your business cards to the back of your mobile phone.

For an attorney, losing a smartphone can mean much more than simply losing a communication device. It can mean the loss of valuable contact or client information, exhibit photos or other important data that one may not have had a chance to back up. For those who choose to lock their devices for security, it may not even be possible for a Good Samaritan to find your contact information and return your phone. And, unfortunately, apps that help you track down your phone may not be as reliable as we would like.

Pro-tip: Back up any important information stored on your phone just as you would back up information on your computer. The suggestions above also apply to laptops and tablets.

3. Use Google Voice as an electronic receptionist.

Google Voice is a free Internet-based calling service that can be an amazing supplement to your existing landline or mobile phone provider. One of the best features is being able to give out a

single number to clients that will ring to all of your different phones (work, home and mobile), or none of them, depending on the time of day or the person calling. This will make it much easier to promptly return phone calls from prospective new clients, or the court clerk that is urgently trying to reach you.

Pro tip: Google Voice has several other useful features including an online voicemail account that sends transcriptions of voice messages to your Gmail account (though these transcriptions can be hilariously unintelligible at times), conference calling, free SMS to email messages and much more.

4. Scan everything!

By scanning anything that you don't already have stored on your computer, you will be able to create an easy-to-use electronic filing system. Such a system allows for quick access and backup of important documents. It may also be a good idea to download a reliable mobile scanner app for your smartphone. This will allow you to scan and upload documents when you are away from the office as paperwork can be lost or damaged while in transit.

Pro tip: Do not go entirely paperless. It is still vitally important to keep hard copies of important and/or confidential case documents, or anything not easily accessible online.

5. Use [Pocket](#) to save pages for later offline reading.

With this app you will be able to continue doing online research even without a Wi-Fi connection or a data plan. For example, if you find an interesting article on your desktop computer at the office, you can take it with you with a click. All of your items will be kept in one place, so you can view, organize and share them on any device. You can save news stories, blog posts, videos, web links and more.

Pro tip: Pocket can be of real benefit if you need to do some last-minute research during your commute or while waiting for the courtroom doors to open.

6. Mark consultations and court times 15 minutes earlier than scheduled on your calendar.

Nothing shows that you are a responsible counselor more than arriving on time for appointments. By being prompt, you let your clients, colleagues and the court know that you appreciate their time. If you pad the start time of such meetings with an extra quarter hour, you will be much more likely to plan ahead and make it to your appointment in a timely fashion.

Pro-tip: If your day calls for back-to-back-to-back consultations, it is also a good idea to add an extra 15 minutes to the expected ending time of each meeting. This will help avoid overlaps that can cause a domino effect of unreasonably long waits for all of your later appointments.

7. Set a task or email reminder to follow up a consultation with a Non-Engagement Letter.

While attorneys are generally good about getting a signed Engagement Letter when they agree to represent someone, they often forget to give a signed Non-Engagement Letter when they *don't* agree to represent someone. Failure to give such notice can lead to major headaches if a miscommunication causes the potential client to mistakenly believe that an attorney-client relationship has been formed. When this happens, you may find yourself having to explain what happened to a judge or the State Bar – especially if a response was not timely filed or a hearing was missed. By setting a reminder in one's calendar or email to send a Non-Engagement Letter, one can better avoid the risk of such an occurrence.

Pro-tip: A Non-Engagement Letter or email can be very polite but should unequivocally state that your services have not been retained, and that no attorney-client relationship has been formed. Such notice may even be needed after casual conversations about personal legal issues with an acquaintance.

8. Keep a spare set of business clothes in your car or office.

It is crucial for attorneys to maintain a professional appearance at all times. However, chances are high that most lawyers have endured their share of clothing disasters, which may include spilled coffee on a pair of slacks, sudden and glaring ink stains over the pocket of your white dress shirt, or even the occasional broken zipper. What is worse is when any of the aforementioned clothing catastrophes occur immediately prior to a court appearance, business meeting or client consultation. By keeping an extra set of clothes at the ready, you can save yourself the embarrassment of having to argue your motion in court with a Grande Soy Latte down the front of your shirt.

Pro-tip: Having an extra suit jacket and an extra pair of dress shoes in the trunk of your car can also come in handy, particularly during bad weather.

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