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# Beyond time management

*Lawyers operate in linear time, and the stress can kill you. There is a way out without dropping out.*

BY LESLIE KEENAN

You probably think that having more time would help you in your practice, and yet the idea of magically being able to find it – short of hiring someone to do some of your work for you – probably seems like a joke. But what if I told you that it is possible to have more time right now?

What I know is that if you give yourself some time off, time spent without thinking about whatever it is that stresses you, you will come back to your work more refreshed. And when you begin to practice this over time, you will discover inside yourself a reservoir of creativity. A reservoir that, when tapped, will allow you to find solutions to difficult problems more quickly. You may find that while you are on a walk the words to your next brief will come to you, or all the points to the argument you need to make.

I have been teaching these methods for over 10 years. I first began practicing them for myself, and was so successful people began asking me to show them what I was doing. My book, *It's About Time*, came out in 2003, and I have been leading *TimeShifters* workshops ever since. Most of my clients are self-employed, and they typically find ways to have less stress – and more time – by practicing these techniques. Many of my self-employed clients are also writers and have been able to finish their books while still maintaining their businesses.

## The three kinds of time

The first thing I teach is an expanded understanding of time. Our culture only understands one kind of time: *linear time*. Linear time is the kind of time that is measured: in hours, minutes, seconds, and in ten-minute billing segments.

But this is not the only kind of time there is.

The second kind of time is what I call *natural time* (it is sometimes also referred to as *cyclical time*). This is the kind of time that you are in when you are in nature. In natural time, things come back around again. It's winter now, then we have spring, summer, fall, and then winter again. Natural-time things have a rhythm and a season. You know you are in natural time when what you are doing will have to be done again (washing dishes, doing laundry, making the bed). Your body is in natural time when it's not overruled by your head which controls linear time. *If you are almost always in linear time, you will really be annoyed by how much slower natural time is.*

There is a third kind of time. I think of this as *being in the flow*. Athletes will also describe it as being “in the zone.”



From this kind of time, things appear effortless and also timeless. You are either surprised by how slowly time goes, or how quickly, when you are in it. You will usually be totally inspired, and ideas will come to you unexpectedly.

When you begin to understand the three kinds of time, and can move between them, and have a balance between them, then you will actually find the resources you need, and as a bonus you will feel happier and more fulfilled.

### Stuck in linear time

If you constantly feel like you just need more time to get everything done, you are most likely stuck in linear time. Linear time can be great for getting things done, and especially for feeling a sense of accomplishment. But if you stay there too long, you feel like the solution to having more time is to do more tasks faster and more efficiently. That doesn't actually work for the long term. You actually end up feeling more stressed and getting less done. The solution is to get out of linear time.

Our bodies are marvels that have been adapting for six million years but don't actually change very quickly. So your body is still living the way it was made – for time before electricity. You are expecting it to make do with six hours of sleep when it needs eight, or to push all the time when it was designed to rest, too.

I spent the night on a farm recently. Since it was winter, the sun set early, and rose late. I realized that life on the farm slows down in winter! The chickens wake up later; there's not much work to do in the fields. Our bodies were designed for this, but because we now live in linear time we expect ourselves to get up in the dark and work the same 10-hour day we do in the warmth and energy of the summer.

Now I realize it may be impossible for you to sleep nine hours in mid-winter, like our ancestors did, but you can certainly make it a goal to get eight hours regularly. There have been numerous studies in the last 15 years on the effects

of sleep deprivation. Thanks to magnetic imaging and other new techniques, we now know the body and mind are both greatly affected. The first study to show the physical effects of sleep deprivation was published in 2004 by the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Eve Van Cauter, a University of Chicago sleep researcher, studied the effects of sleep deprivation on healthy young men and found that their subsequent test results for insulin seemed more like those of 60-year-old men. She found it can accelerate the aging process, lead to obesity and increase the risk of some diseases. A 2000 study at University of California San Diego and San Diego VA medical center used functional magnetic resonance imaging to see how the brain functioned with sleep deprivation. "Sleep deprivation is bad for your brain when you are trying to do high-level [thinking] tasks," study co-author J. Christian Gillin, MD, was quoted on WebMD. "It may have serious consequences both on performance and on the way your brain functions."

### Getting in the flow

So the first step to having more time is to get out of linear time and let yourself be in natural time, too. This will rejuvenate your body and give you more energy, but the resources that are infinite are located in the flow. The thing about flow time is that you can't force yourself to be there (that is a linear time approach that will backfire). However, by beginning to consistently move back and forth between linear and natural time, you will make it more likely that you will find yourself there. Another way to encourage the flow is to begin to practice meditation. I am not saying you have to become some kind of monk or say *om*, but even five minutes a day of sitting still and breathing while relaxing your mind and body can have an enormous payoff. By doing this consistently (and preferably at the start of your day), you will begin to open yourself up to unexpected inspirations.

Here is an example from my life. I usually have to write as part of my work. One thing I had to write frequently was back-cover copy for a book. It used to take me about a week to have something I was satisfied with. I would write and write, then rewrite, then sleep on it and finalize it. The total hours may have been 10. Today, I can write something I'm completely happy with in about a half hour. I still let myself sleep on it, and I will put finishing touches on it, but I would say my productivity has increased tenfold in my writing. This is because I am rested, I have access to the flow consistently, and I am inspired.

How will this look for you? When you are working on a deadline, instead of working nine hours straight, give yourself a ten minute break every hour, and get up and walk around – outside if you can. Take an hour to have lunch and go away from your desk to eat it. Eat slowly and relish your food. Experiment with taking a 20 minute nap (no more than a half hour though or you will get more tired). Use an eye pillow and set your timer. These techniques will keep you from getting sucked in to the debilitating rushing sensations of linear time.

### Warning signs of being imprisoned in linear time

*You feel like you just need to do this one more thing and then everything will be okay.*

*You feel a sense of urgency and crisis – if this thing doesn't get done; well, you can't even imagine what will happen if this thing doesn't get done. It just has to get done.*

*The big lie: Once this project is over, or I've resolved this case, or the children have grown, then I'll have more time, I'll relax more often.*

*Your inability to stop checking in on your e-mail, phone messages, or with your office.*

*Tension in your body.*

*You blame others for wasting your time: traffic, long lines, people who talk too long on the phone.*



## How to disconnect from hyper-linear time

• **Stop.** Just stop what you are doing and take a time-out. You can repeat an affirmation over and over, focus on your breathing, or just get up from your desk and look out the window.

• **Take a “coffee break.”** Rituals are a good way to get out of linear time. Just getting up and going through those motions of a coffee break can interrupt the linear thought process.

• **Go for a walk.** A walk is a very good way to interrupt the linear thought pattern. Walking cannot be done fast. Even the fastest walk is slower than the addictive linear thought process will want.

In 10 years of teaching this approach to time, I have noticed that linear-time pressures have mounted in our culture. I have begun calling the current experience of linear time *hyper-linear*

time. Thanks to technological innovations, we can now feel pressured 24 hours a day because we are never able to be away from work reminders, whether it’s e-mail, cell phone or the 24-hour news cycle.

The law has always had more deadline pressures than most businesses, but today the pressure to turn out briefs and get filings done more quickly is greater than ever. This means that the benefit of giving yourself down-time – shifting from linear to natural time – is greater now than ever. I teach my clients to define “enough” and “done” for themselves at the end of a project and a work day, so you can turn off the cell phone and stop checking the email until the next day, and immerse yourself in natural time to refresh and rejuvenate.

There is much more to using *TimeShifting* techniques, including keeping track of your time and creating time

plans to help you balance between the three kinds of time, but just beginning to be conscious that linear time is not the only time there is will begin to help you feel less pressure in your life. By learning to access the flow, you will be tapping into the greatest resource you have: your own creativity.



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