

BECOME A SUPER CLERK!

Texas Justice Court Training Center

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What to Expect

In this class we will go over ideas and suggestions that will help you become a Super Clerk.

- The Myth of Multitasking
- Time Management Tools
- Motivation and Self-Care

Resources

- Some of the content in the Myth of Multitasking and Time Management Tools sections was adapted from the Time Management Fundamentals course by Dave Crenshaw:
 - <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/time-management-fundamentals>
 - The course has a lot of additional information and activities.
- Additional tips from Dave Crenshaw are available to the public on his blog:
 - <https://davecrenshaw.com/blog/>
- Additional information relating to clerk duties and responsibilities can be found in TJCTC's Officeholding Deskbook:
 - <https://www.tjctc.org/tjctc-resources/Deskbooks.html>

The Myth of Multitasking

Multitasking

- Everybody talks about multitasking...the ability to do more than one thing at a time.
- But the truth is, our brains work sequentially, and we can only successfully do one thing at a time.
 - “Multitasking is not humanly possible” -*Earl K. Miller, Neuroscience Professor, Picower Institute for Learning and Memory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

“Background Tasking” vs. “Switchtasking”

“Background tasking”

- Can still be productive and efficient.
- When something mindless occurs in the background that doesn't require your attention.
- *Ex: having laundry going while you read e-mails.*

“Switchtasking”

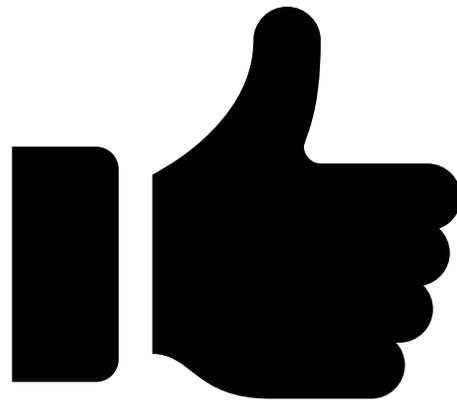
- Not productive or efficient.
- Switching back and forth rapidly between two or more tasks that need your attention.
- *Ex: participating in a meeting and reading e-mail at the same time.*
- **The Downfalls:** Annoys people; Takes more time; Decreases quality; Increases mistakes; Increases stress

Background Tasking vs. Switchtasking

- On the next slide, we're going to watch a video by Dave Crenshaw where we will learn more about these concepts and do an activity.
- You will need a piece of paper and something to write with – get that now!
- When he gets to the activity, he'll explain what to do and then tell you to start. It is timed – so do not start writing until he says “Go”!

Interruptions

Put a thumbs up (*click on the “Reactions” button on the bottom of your Zoom screen*) if you’ve **never** been interrupted while you’re working on something with another task or question.



Managing Interruptions

- Interruptions happen. Some must be addressed in the moment and some do not.
- Too many interruptions break your focus and keep you from getting your work done.
- But there are ways to manage interruptions to minimize their impact.

Managing Interruptions

- **Catch your breath** – Take a minute to consider the request and determine if it can be taken care of at a later time.
- **Learn to say “No”** – It may be acceptable to say “no” to a request or task if someone else should handle it, if it is not important, or if it can be done later.
 - *Note:* You will need to consult with your supervisor or judge about what falls into this category.
- **Minimize small talk** – A little is OK, but don’t get distracted or let this go on for too long.

Managing Interruptions

- **Schedule a time to meet** – Depending on the interruption, it might make sense to schedule a time for the conversation, especially if it is complex or time consuming.
- **Set parameters** – If scheduling a time doesn't make sense, say how much time you have and stick to it the best you can.
 - If something is going to take longer than expected, reconsider scheduling a time to meet.
- **If a task needs your immediate attention** – ***Stop*** what you are doing and ***focus*** on what needs to get done. Once it is completed, you can return to what you were doing.

Answer in the Chat!

1. What are some examples of interruptions you experience that need immediate attention?
2. What are some examples of interruptions you experience that *do not* need immediate attention?



Time Management Tools

Gathering Points and Unprocessed Items

- More terms coined by Dave Crenshaw.
- What are “gathering points”?
- What are “unprocessed items”?
- Why is it important to reduce your gathering points?

Activity

How many of each of the following types of gathering points do you have? Tally them and then share your total number in the chat!

Paper task lists, to do lists, etc.	Messaging apps
Piles of papers or other things	Paper notepads
Desk drawers/trays (if used for unprocessed stuff)	Post it notes
Filing cabinets (if used for unprocessed stuff)	Physical inboxes/mailboxes
Voice recorder (if used for tasks, ideas, etc.)	Email inboxes
Your mind (if used to remember tasks)	Computer desktop screen
Computer task lists and organization/task apps	Voicemails
Scraps of paper (receipts, cards, etc.)	Wallet/Purse/Planner/Briefcase pockets
Whiteboards/corkboards (if used for tasks, etc.)	Assistants (employees, co-workers)
Storage areas (if used for unprocessed stuff)	Other

Organizing Your Physical Workspace

- Keep a physical inbox for all “unprocessed” items (more info on processing coming up!)
- Keep everything else in its place
 - Categorize items that are similar together – whatever categories work for you!
 - Keep categories clearly separated (ex: separate files or trays)

Organizing Your Physical Workspace

Post-it Notes

- Don't have a bunch all over the place – its easy to lose track of one and takes time to keep checking them!
- Reminders to yourself should go on a to-do list or calendar instead.
- If it is a note about a document, put it on the document and put that document in its home.
- Mostly, use these to relay messages to others.

Processing Items

- This is when you go through all of the items in a gathering point and decide what to do with each one and when it needs to be done by.
- You don't actually handle the tasks at this point – just get them scheduled or the items put away.

Processing Items

- If possible, schedule time in your week to process all items (or all items in a particular gathering point) all at once – this is more focused and efficient!
- Process items one at a time and finish each one before moving on.
- Decide what the next step is – this can be an action on your part, delegating, deciding not to do it, or waiting on someone else or something else for something.
- If something can be done in a few min or less, do it right then. Otherwise, put it on your calendar/to do list for later.

Urgent Items

- Some gathering points – like e-mail and voicemail – are more urgent and may need to be checked between scheduled processing times.
- Check with your supervisor or judge about what things need to be checked daily or even more often and any deadlines for responding to or addressing them.

E-mail Tips

- Filters to make certain messages go directly to specific folders
 - Pros and Cons
 - If you do this, make sure not to forget to check the folders!
- Keep work e-mail separate from personal email
 - For record-keeping purposes and to avoid non-work distractions.
- Notifications
 - Helpful if you need to know every time a message comes in.
 - Otherwise, consider turning off and just checking email at regular scheduled intervals.

Office Email, Mail, Fax

- Need a system for checking office e-mail accounts, mail, and fax.
 - Avoids duplication of work and things getting missed.
 - Who is responsible for checking which things and when? What if that person is out?
 - Who is responsible for responding to what has already been checked and/or making sure any tasks are being handled?

Breakout Room Discussion: What system does your office have?

Keeping a Clear Mind

- Work can be chaotic and throw a lot of things at you. Keeping a clear mind helps you manage everything and do a better job with each task.
- What happens when you are thinking about all of the things you need to do all at the same time?
 - Can be overwhelming.
 - Keeps you from focusing and doing anything very well.
 - Can make you slower and less efficient.
 - Causes you stress.

Keeping a Clear Mind

How do you clear your mind?

- **Random Ideas** - When an idea comes into your head, get it out as quickly as possible and put it into the most convenient approved gathering point.
 - ex: note in physical inbox or notepad, send yourself an email, leave a voice mail or text for yourself, etc.
- **Regular Purges** - Every few months – go through all the different parts of your job and make a list of anything that needs to be done that isn't already on the calendar/to do list

Budgeting Your Time Effectively

- **Keeping a good calendar is the most important tool!**
- **Digital is best**
 - Better for recurring tasks, docket, meetings, etc.
 - Synchs across devices
 - Don't have to worry about losing it
 - Make sure it is being backed up via cloud or something similar
- **Schedule everything and think about how much time each task/event will take**
 - Factor in time spent on phone or at the front window.
 - Be realistic about how much time things take.
 - Schedule into the future and space out projects that don't need to be done right away.

Budgeting Your Time Effectively

- **Schedule buffer time (to handle interruptions, prep for the next thing, etc.).**
- **Don't double book.**
- **Never commit to something without putting it on your calendar.**
- **Stick to your calendar as much as possible.**
 - Avoid activities that aren't in your calendar and aren't necessary.
 - But adjustments may need to be made.
 - Have targets for the week or month, and then modify as needed base on any changes to your schedule.

Hearings and Dockets

- **When scheduling, build in a realistic amount of time and think about what flow will be most efficient.**
 - What kinds should be grouped together and how many at once?
- **Remember Coronavirus requirements!**
 - Remote: build in time to deal with technology issues.
 - In person: remember social distancing requirements and limits on numbers of people.
- **Even after COVID, there will probably continue to be a lot of virtual hearings.**
 - Use tools to maximize efficiency (ex: waiting rooms, sending out info ahead of time, etc.)
 - Make sure to check out TJCTC's self-paced module on remote hearings (coming soon!).

Meetings

- **Keep meetings productive and efficient.**
- **Stay on topic.**
- **If you are organizing a meeting or helping with it:**
 - Use agendas (should be sent out ahead of time).
 - Keep the number of items to be covered realistic for the amount of time scheduled for the meeting.
 - Have a notetaker and send notes out after.
 - Make sure everyone knows what their action items are when it is over.

Deadlines and Prioritization

- Always have or ask for deadlines and prioritize tasks based on importance and/or urgency.
- You don't want to miss something that has to be done today because you are working on something that could be done next week.
- A lot of priorities and deadlines will depend on court/county policies and convention.
- **Example:** in Judge Hays' court, the priority is phone/window duties and making sure timeframes (whether required by law or set by court policy) are followed, but when things are slow or there is extra time, clerks work on a list of non-urgent projects ordered by importance.

Deadlines and Prioritization

- Know who is in charge of what so things don't slip through the cracks.
- If you're a manager:
 - Put requests in writing so everyone is on the same page and knows what the deadlines are.
 - Have a system for reminders and accountability.

Poll Question

Which is the highest priority?

- A. A customer at the window.
- B. Preparing a citation for an eviction case that was just filed.
- C. A message for the judge about a death scene that needs an inquest.
- D. An application for an Emergency Detention Order

Poll Question

Which is the highest priority?

- A. A court case records request from a sovereign citizen that came in a week ago.
- B. A motion for default judgment that was filed two days ago.
- C. Preparing a written judgment for a hearing that was held earlier in the day.

Motivation & Self-Care

Taking Initiative

- **Care about making your office better/more efficient – this will end up making your job better and more enjoyable too.**
 - If you have an idea for an improvement or a project, share it!
- **You won't ever understand everything – don't get discouraged!**
 - Research your questions and be proactive at knowing where to get the info you need.
 - Learn how and practice with the Legal Research self-paced module (coming soon!)

Taking Initiative

- **Take notes on paper or electronically (not in your head).**
 - To remember what you've learned and what you need to do.
 - Make sure to put any tasks into your calendar/checklist.
 - File away info you will need to reference in the future – and make sure to look at it when needed! Notes are useless if you don't use them!
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions or ask for help.**
 - Things you don't understand.
 - Things you think aren't being done right.
 - It is better to ask and get it right then to have to fix something later!

Speaking Up if Overloaded

- **Ask for requests to be made by email where possible so you have all of the details and have time to process if and when you can do them.**
 - If not possible, make sure to take good notes so you remember what is being asked.
 - Follow up if you realize there are any issues with what you need to do or the deadlines for doing it.
- **Know when to say no or later to others and yourself.**
 - For things where this is up to you.

Speaking Up if Overloaded

- **Don't spread yourself too thin.**
 - If you have more than you can handle, talk to your supervisor and figure out how to share tasks, shift prioritization/deadlines, etc.
- **Delegate when possible.**
 - Think about the tasks in your workday and determine what needs to be done by you and what should be handed off to another member of your team.
 - This will depend on your court and supervisor.

Bonding vs. Slacking

Bonding and venting is important, but be careful!

- Don't let it take up too much time and interfere with your work.
- Don't get negative.
- Make sure you stay appropriate.
- Be courteous of others.
- Remember: there is a time and place for everything.

Boundaries Between Work and Personal

- It is important to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- Sometimes, you may need to work a little late or do something for work on a weekend – but don't let this get out of hand.
- And when you are not working, let it go and be present!
 - Remember about clearing your mind. If you can't stop thinking about something for work, make a note for yourself for later and then stop worrying about it.

Managing Stress

You need to take care of yourself to avoid burnout, excessive anxiety, depression, and other negative effects of too much stress.

Tips for Managing Stress

- **Meaningful activities** – Do activities that bring you satisfaction. These may take time and energy, but can leave you feeling happier and less stressed.
- **Don't over-book yourself** – Make time in your life for resting, relaxing, and recharging.

Tips for Managing Stress

- **Exercise** – If you feel like you can't find the time, just doing something short during your lunch time can give you a boost.
 - Ex: Take a short walk, do quick yoga at your desk (YouTube videos and apps for this), etc.
- **Breaks** – Especially with a difficult or overwhelming task, even just a couple minutes away can help you come back refreshed and be more productive.
 - Ex: Chat for a few minutes with a co-worker, watch a funny YouTube video, meditate, walk around the building, etc.

Tips for Managing Stress

- **Meditation** – from 1 minute to much longer - YouTube videos, apps like Calm, Headspace, 10% Happier, etc.
- **Counseling** – some options available through county or insurance; also online apps like betterhelp and talkspace.
- **Happiness Lab podcast** – lots of episodes with great tips.



Goal Setting and Professional Development

- Think about where you would like to be in 5 years and any short-term goals you have for your job.
- Think about any topics where you would like to take a course or increase your skills.
- Get your supervisor on board – explain how these things will be beneficial for both you and your court.

Breakout Room Discussion: What goals or professional development interests do you have?