

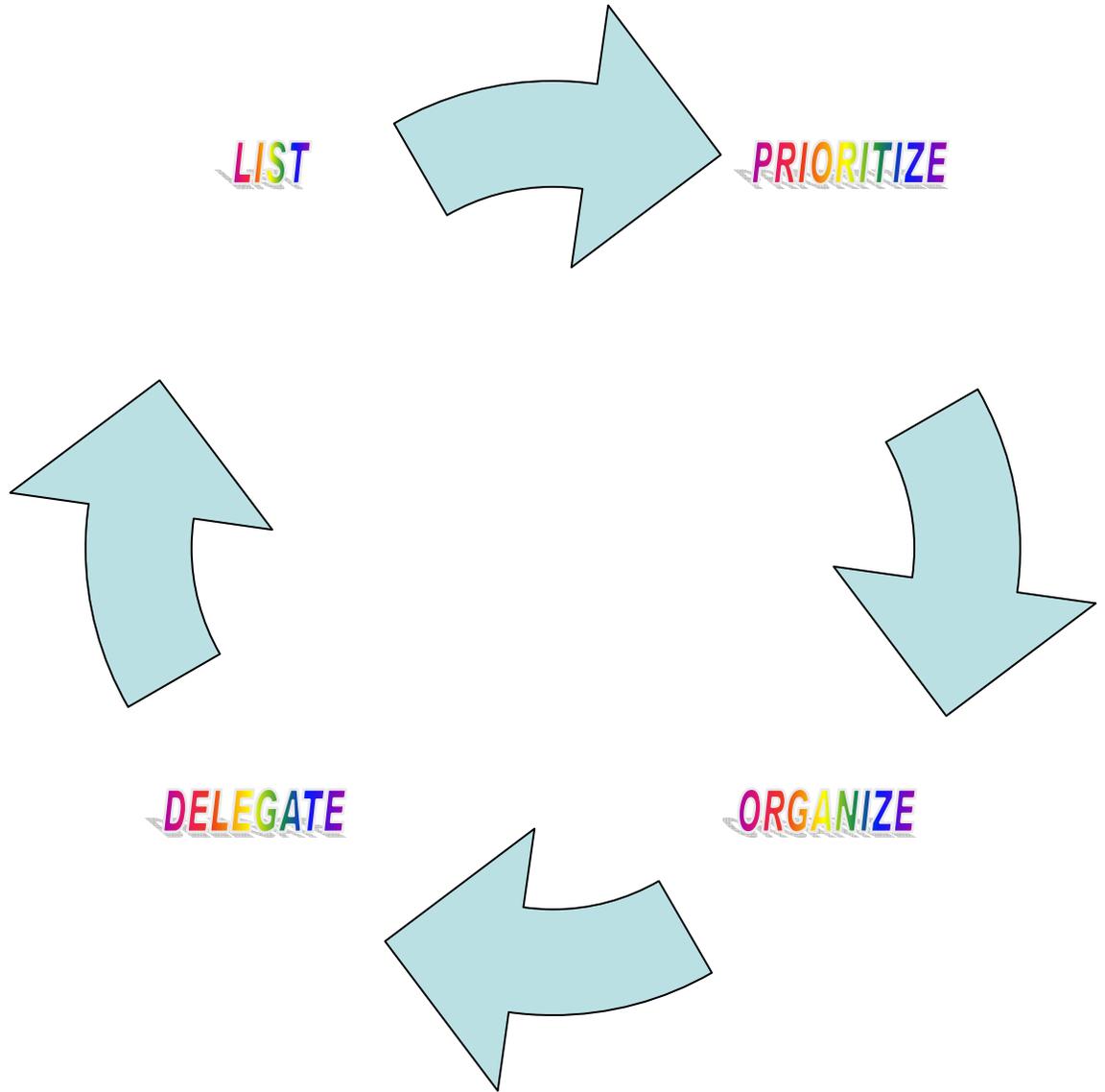
LPOD

A Guide to Time Management



Most lawyers are very busy people. Juggling the needs of clients, the requirements of courts and the wishes of families and friends can be very difficult. Failure to do so successfully can have disastrous consequences, both personally and professionally. Enter LPOD- an approach to time management that can help you to regain control of your days, maximize efficiency, work quality, client satisfaction and the quality of your own life.

The acronym stands for L-List P- Prioritize O- Organize and D-Delegate. The original acronym was I-POD- Inventory- Prioritize- Organize-Delegate. It was changed to avoid any concerns over trademark or copyright infringement. LPOD is designed as a cyclical process, to be repeated on a regular basis.



LPOD CYCLE

The following paragraphs will detail each stage of the cycle, including the questions that you should ask yourself to be ready to move to the next phase of the cycle. Although some steps in the process will become more automatic with practice, skipping a step entirely will probably diminish the effectiveness of the process. A diagrammatic representation of the process is included at the end to serve both those students who learn better from pictures and as a briefer reminder for all.

LIST



Atul Gawande's 2009 Bestselling book, The Checklist Manifesto, extols the virtues of checklists for getting things done right. LPOD uses lists simply to get things done.

The first step in LPOD is to create an inclusive list of what needs to be done. Task lists in Outlook and other resources can be helpful with one caveat. LPOD is used to coordinate everything the user needs to do, so if your Outlook Task list only includes work related items, LPOD will not be optimally effective. Your LPOD list should include everything.

The second step of the LIST phase is to understand how long each task takes to do. Are you sure that you know the answer to that? If so, you can move to the next phase **but** - you probably shouldn't do that yet!

Most users should do a calendar exercise initially and whenever LPOD stops working. The calendar exercise is simple but most people don't like to do it. To do the calendar exercise effectively, track exactly how you spend your time, in increments of no greater than 15 minutes for 2-3 days. Most people significantly underestimate how long certain tasks take. This miscalculation can be a major source of time management problems. Things take as long as they take. Wishful thinking leads to poor planning, lateness for appointments with clients and others and stress. The best solution for this concern is measurement- so take the time and do it.

PRIORITIZE



Prioritization means what it says- are your goals and priorities clear to you? If so, you are ready to move on to the **ORGANIZE** step. If not, you may consider the following approaches to help.

This graphic, adapted from Covey's The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People may be helpful. The book is also available in a much shorter audio version which some may find more user friendly.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •crises •pressing problems •deadline-driven projects, meetings, preparations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •preparation •prevention •values clarification •planning •relationship building •true recreation •empowerment
NOT IMPORTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •interruptions, some phone calls •some mail, some reports •some meetings •many proximate, pressing matters •many popular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •trivia, busy work •some phone calls •time wasters •"escape" activities •irrelevant mail •excessive TV

Discussions with friends, family, mentors and the use of formal goals setting approaches may also be of assistance.

ORGANIZE

The first question to ask each morning is, “Do I take the time to plan my day?” The answer should be YES. If the answer is NO, changing that is the first step.

After taking the time to plan your day, it is time to assess whether your plans work. If so, you are ready to move on. If not, it is time to consider why not. Consider 3 likely explanations for the failure of a plan.



- 1) **Procrastination:** The list of common causes of procrastination is repeated at the end of the course for easy reference. The calendar exercise may help people who don't recognize the cost of wasted time- that information alone can be very motivating to change behavior. People also procrastinate because of fear of failure, and not wanting others to see them calm with all tasks completed. Some believe that looking busy with lots to do will attract positive attention and lead to promotion- generally wrong. Sometimes tasks are inherently unappealing. Many don't recognize that the presence of many incomplete tasks increases stress and learn to appreciate the relief that comes with accomplishment.
- 2) **Unscheduled Interruptions and Emergencies:** The first question is whether the unscheduled interruptions and emergencies are truly random or actually occur in a pattern. The calendar exercise may help to identify patterns, such as how many times does an emergent court date comes up, or how often a truly urgent client call occurs. Identifying patterns, which are much more common than truly random acts, allows for better planning. Truly random acts require coping- there is no magic solution for them.
- 3) **Unrealistic Agendas:** These require a different approach. The first step is a reprise of an earlier theme. Are your time estimates accurate? If not, that is the problem that must be addressed first. If time estimates are accurate, the next step is to re-prioritize. If things are not important, don't do them. Learn to say 'no' (nicely). When things are important, and you can't get them done, the next phase of the cycle, delegation, becomes even more important

DELEGATE

In practice, learning to delegate appropriately is a very difficult skill. The first question to ask is, “Am I the best person to do this task? If the answer is yes, the follow up question is, “Am I the only person to do this?” If the answer to that question is also yes, then just do it. Keep in mind a few efficiency tips: 1) Pick a good time to do the task- when you are tired, hungry or have other critical biological needs to attend to, that is not a good time. 2) TIO rule- touch it once rule- apply to email, mail and phone messages as much as possible 3) Clean up as you go along 4) Throw things out- you don’t need to keep everything 5) Plan rewards for yourself- it’s amazing how motivating the right treat can be.

When a task should be delegated, the next question to ask is, “Is it easy to delegate?” If it is, you are all set. If it isn’t, it’s important to think about why not. The answers to that question may lead you to identify other opportunities for improvement within your team or office. If you can’t delegate an appropriate task to the person you think should do it, what is getting in the way? Generally a problematic authority gradient or hierarchy issue is an easy answer but not the right answer. Does your team function well or do you need additional work in team building, formal team training or conflict resolution? Is your communication style optimal for getting the results you are looking for? Is the task really important or the person you are delegating to resistant because the task really is a waste of time? Did your tone or body language convey a message that made others less willing to help?



Implementing LPOD or another time management system is not automatic. It takes consistent work, effort, reflection and honest self assessment. But it's worth it. The returns in productivity, client satisfaction, staff satisfaction, happiness and free time will speak for themselves. Give it a try. Good luck.



Post **LPOD** Course Questions:
(Please return the answers to the instructor)

- 1) What will I do differently as a result of the **List** questions? Was there any opportunity for me there?
- 2) Is **Prioritizing** an area of strength for me? What will I try to improve?
- 3) Does the **Organizing** idea help me? Do I also think about how I group my tasks, even if they are of different priority levels to save time? For example, I desperately need coffee from the store today. I won't need milk till tomorrow. Would I do both tasks at the same time to save time overall? How does that example fit into the work day?
- 4) Do I **Delegate** well? What do I or my team need to do differently to improve our overall productivity?

LPOD Course Assessment:

- 1) I found this course useful Y N
- 2) The format of the course was effective for the topic Y N
- 3) I would recommend this course to a friend or colleague Y N
- 4) This course could be improved if

- 5) Future topics of interest to me would be
