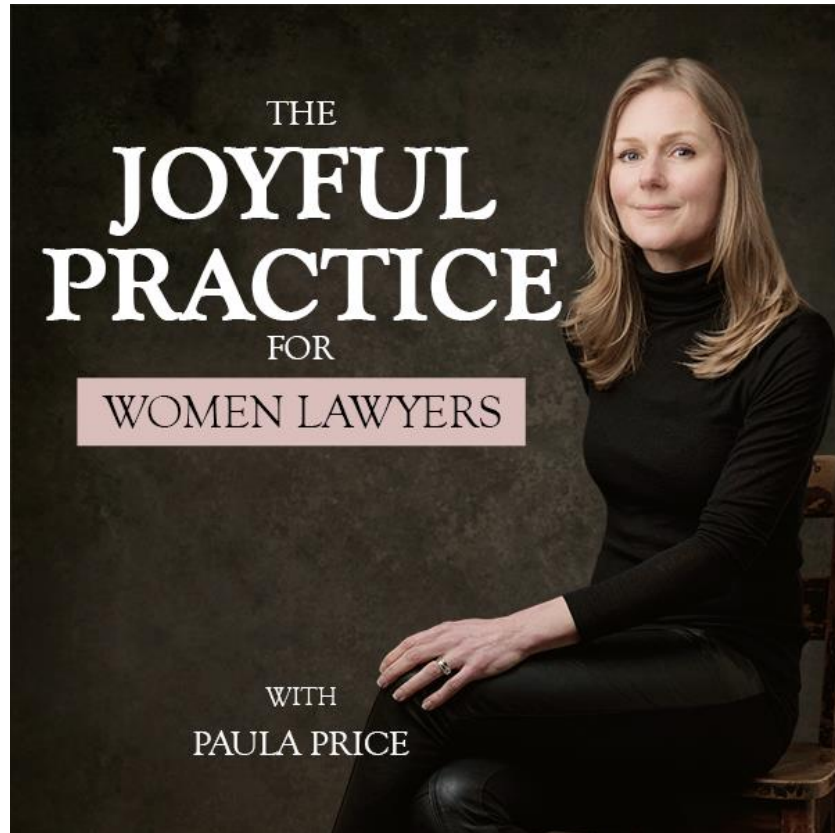


Ep #2: 8 Time Management Tips for Lawyers



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

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You are listening to The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers podcast episode number two.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, litigator turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. It's your time away from the daily hustle to focus on taking care of you. To see where you're stuck, figure out what you truly want, and learn coaching tools that will help you define and create success on your own terms.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hello my friends, and welcome. Thank you so much for joining me in today's podcast episode. It's such a treat to have you here. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Paula Price. I am a lawyer turned certified executive coach. I created this podcast because I wanted to create a way to connect with women lawyers and create a forum and an opportunity to talk about some of the things that are going on in your practice. And offer some coaching tools that can help you create a practice with less stress, more joy, more ease. All those good things.

Today's episode is all about time management, which is a topic that comes up quite a bit among the lawyers that I work with in my coaching practice. It comes up for a number of reasons, and it looks different depending on your practice.

So for you, time management challenges may come up in the nature of having too much work on your plate. I think we can all relate to that where you've just had so many different projects coming in from all different angles. You may be sitting there thinking about how you're going to

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manage to get them all done by the deadlines that are assigned to each of them.

It could also be that you have a schedule that you're working on, but you have too many interruptions. You're at your computer. You get those emails, the ones with the nice bright red exclamation point next to them that require your immediate attention or things will fall apart. You may also have the experience of multiple deadlines all arriving at the same time. The result that it creates for you is that you always feel like you're behind. You always feel rushed. You're maybe a little bit on edge, and you feel like you're behind schedule. You start to feel a bit overwhelmed.

At the end of the day, you look at what you've accomplished, you look at what's left on your to do list, and you just feel like there's too much there. That sometimes can lead to burnout if left unmanaged. So the purpose of today's podcast is really to offer up some tools to help you design a time management practice that better aligns with you and your goals, your strengths, and what is going to work in your practice.

So before we jump in, I'm going to offer you about eight tools. Before we do that, I just wanted to cover some of the reasons behind this time management challenge. As I go through the podcast, I would invite you to reflect on what's happening in your practice. Really think about which pieces you can adopt and adapt to help you figure out some systems that will work for you.

So first going to some of the causes of these challenges. Number one is I think we have a tendency of wanting to do it all. You want to help others. So when they come to you with your problems, you want to be able to say yes to them. Conversely you also do not want to say no to them. You don't want to disappoint them by not taking on the work that they've asked you to do.

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Maybe you feel like you would like to say no, but there is something that's holding you back. Maybe it's a concern that it's your boss asking you to do that work, and if you say no, they're going to be upset with you. Maybe it's somebody that you really, really want to work with, and you're worried that if you say no, you're not going to have another opportunity to work with them again. So there may be multiple reasons why you're taking on more work than you're really comfortable managing in a given time period.

It may also be that part of the reason you're having trouble managing your time is that you are taking on too much and that you're overworking. You find yourself less productive in the hours that you have allocated to your work.

So that might look like getting really tired and trying to do your work. You sit down to do your work, and instead of getting started and jumping into the project, you need a coffee break. So you go and you grab a coffee. Then you decide well maybe I'll check my email. The result is that you're not working as productively as you could be. That's taking more time to do the assignments that you have.

So these are just some areas where time managements start to crop up, the challenges might start to crop up. If these are happening to you, I just want to reassure you, you are definitely not alone. I hope that some of the tools that I'll offer today will help you get past them.

So I know that you are all highly intelligent women. You are lawyers. You are practicing at a high level. So the idea of creating a time management system is well within your capacity. You may have tried tools or tried calendars or apps to help you, and maybe they haven't really worked before. I don't think that's anything that you need to blame yourself for.

I know I've been in that position where I hear these time management suggestions, and I think that's really great for you because you work in an

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office environment where it's nine to five. You have one source of work, and you can schedule your days. Or you're an entrepreneur, you have more control over your time. You can say no whenever you want. For you, the situation might be different.

So as we go through the tools, it may be that one of the tools doesn't speak to you. But there may be a way of asking yourself, "Well, what if I were to adapt this tool so that it would work for me." So what we're going to do now is jump into the eight tools that I've identified as being generally very helpful for lawyers in getting better control over a time in their practices. This comes from my own experience. It comes from my experience coaching lawyers in my practice.

The first tool, which is to take a step back. This is something that I think we don't often give ourselves the time or the space to do. It's so important because it allows you to get the big picture and figure out where you are situating your time management system. So what does that mean?

Well, it means having a look first of all at what your goals are. Maybe it's been a while since you thought about your goals. So that would be a whole other exercise and a whole other podcast episode, but one that I encourage you to think about. What is it that you want to accomplish in the next six months? What is it that you want to accomplish in the next year? What are you putting on your schedule today that is going to help you get there?

Another area where I would invite you to take a step back is to reexamine what your values are. Your values change. They evolve and they adapt over time, but if you look at those, they also help you to create a framework for putting on your schedule things that are important to you. So some examples of values are family, health. Those matter too. When you're creating your schedule, I would encourage you to find time to make sure that they are prioritized.

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In the work environment, it may be that you have specific goals. Maybe it's producing work at the highest quality. Maybe it is having really strong connections and relationships with your colleagues and your clients. Maybe it's creating novel work products. Maybe it's growth. Maybe it's learning. These are questions that you get to ask yourself in terms of figuring out what it is that is most important to you at a core level, at the level of your values.

The reason that this is important is that when you have your goals in mind, when you have your values in mind, that gives you a framework that you can now use to plug in your activities. That's beneficial for two reasons.

Number one, you get to align your goals and the amount of time you spend working towards them. Which means overall you're going to be more productive. You're going to make more headway towards the things you really want. It also means that you'll come to your tasks with more energy. Because when you're working on something that you're truly engaged in that really matters to you, time has a way of slipping by in a good way.

Another goal I would invite you to set for yourself while we're on the topic is to imagine what a good time management practice looks like for you. Asked the question, often, of what is the best time management system? Tell me what calendar I need, what app I need, what software I need. There is no answer to that question. There is no one single one size fits all program that I can say is the program for you or anybody for that matter. It's going to look different depending on what your life looks like. How you work, your energy levels at different times of the day.

So I would ask you to think about what is well managed time in my world. Maybe that means I am calm most of the time. Sometimes you may get stressed. Maybe there are hard deadlines, and it gets a little bit sweaty. That's normal. Maybe the general mode of operation is I don't want to feel stressed around time.

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Maybe it's I deliver my assignments or my court materials two days ahead of time, one day ahead of time instead of leaving things to the last minute. Maybe it's having a strong presence. When you're in the room with somebody, you are present in the room with them. You're not thinking about all the things that are on your to do list that you're not doing.

For each of you, that is going to look different, but I would invite you to write a list, maybe five or six bullet points, of what the ideal practice looks like for you. Because that will help you get clear in your mind the goals that you want to work towards as you create your own ideal time management system.

The next tip that I want to share with you is one that is a game changer for a number of the lawyers that I have worked with in the past. Now these are lawyers who have successful practices at various stage of their practice. They don't have a formal time that they allocate to scheduling. What that means is that they get their work done, but often it's at the last minute.

There may be some procrastination involved in their work. They feel a little bit panicked here and there. They feel like their practice is very reactive. Like they are running around putting out fires. They may miss things. It comes from not having a formal structure in place where they actually devote time to creating their schedule.

So what this would look like is allocating time. For most lawyers that I work with, what I recommend is allocating time at the beginning of the week, allocating time at the end of the week, and allocating some time along the week to scheduling and creating your calendar. Monday morning is a very popular time. Some clients like to get into the office early. Maybe it's getting in about 30 minutes early.

It means you sit down with your workload, wherever it is that you have your list of items. Maybe this is the first time you're doing it. We'll talk about that

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in the next step. Looking at your workload and figuring out how you're going to do your work over the course of the week so that it's balanced, and things are getting done. This means drilling down, identifying your daily priorities. It means figuring out how you're going to do work this week that will be relevant to filing deadlines that are maybe coming up next week, etcetera. So part of it is taking that time to do the planning.

Another excellent time that I recommend for planning your week is on Sunday. Sometimes it's Sunday night. Maybe it's an activity that you do on Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon. Again, it's that same idea of sitting down with your calendar and figuring out what is coming up that week and then scheduling it in.

For those of you who have that whole Sunday scaries thing, this can be really liberating. It can really help with your anxiety levels because you now have a practice where you're getting your schedule under control. You know what's coming at you during the week, and you've predicted and forecasted where it is that you're going to allocate your time so that you can get everything done that is important to you.

Now I've mentioned that there are a few other checkpoints along the way. I would recommend at the end of the week doing a bit of a debrief with yourself. Looking at your calendar, looking at what got done, what didn't get done, giving yourself a pat on the back for all that you've accomplished, and making note of what you're carrying forward to the following week.

Finally, over the course of the week, I recommend having check-ins daily. Looking at your calendar and seeing how you are in relation to the items on your checklist, and what's actually getting done. That's a really good way of maybe keeping on track of things. But also, if you need to reschedule or move things around, you now are doing that consciously as opposed to kind of just jumping in and closing your eyes and hoping that everything gets done by the end of the week.

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Number three is putting your to do list on paper. Now for some of you, all the things that you need to do are floating around in your head. You have big brains and lots of capacity. So you are able to operate that way. Now, the reason that I recommend not doing that is that it is occupying your mental energy that you could spend on other things.

So what I suggest to you is to have a piece of paper or have an open word document, and to go in and write down all the things that are on your mind. All the things that are on your to do list. That means everything that is happening in your work. Everything on every file, all of the speaking engagements that you have, all of the extracurricular work activities that you have. Then everything that involves your personal life from doctor's appointments to banking you need to do to kid appointments that you need to attend to.

Anything that you have, I recommend putting it on a single sheet of paper and creating from there your calendar, your schedule. Which we will get to next. The important thing here is really focus on getting it out of your brain and onto something else so that you can free up your mental space because you can use that mental energy to do something more constructive, like our next task which is scheduling.

So scheduling, number four, really is an art. It's something that I used to do reasonably well, but since I became a coach, I've actually really upped my game in terms of scheduling. Because now I'm looking at a number of different factors that form a framework for how I like to schedule my time. I share these tips with clients, and I think they find it really helpful as well because they're better able to use their time. They can be more productive when they're strategic about what they put where.

So the most important thing I think to think about when you're scheduling is to look at your energy levels. Now, this is going to be different for everybody. For some of you, you will have your best energy in the morning.

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For some of you, you're going to have your best energy late at night. I would invite you to think about when you like writing papers or drafting long agreements or creating your court submissions or doing your legal research. Tasks that require a lot of mental focus, those are the tasks that you want to put into the time of day where you have your best energy.

In my case, I like to put my hard thinking tasks or my creative tasks first thing in the morning because that's where I have my best energy. My brain works most effectively. I've tried different methods. When I was in school doing my coaching program, I would do my homework. I had lots of homework. I was in my 40s, and I had school. I would leave my homework until after my kids had gone to bed.

What I found is I would be sitting at my computer. I would be tired so I would take a little trip over to the cupboard to find a sweet snack to give me some energy. Then I would sit down, and then I'd get up, and then I'd sit down. The whole exercise of doing my homework would take hours, but really the amount of that I would spend working was probably not hours. It was closer to maybe 20 minutes.

So how I've restructured my days, I now wake up extremely early by most people's standards. But it means that I get to have pockets of time in the morning where I'm totally uninterrupted, where my brain is fresh, and I can power through tasks really quickly relative to trying to do those tasks later in the day. So something similar might work for you.

The second art of scheduling after energy management is, and I've sort of touched on this, matching the tasks to your energy levels. So if you know when your high mental energy times of day are then you also can probably figure out where your lower energy times are. You may also find there are times of day where you have a lot of interruptions. You get a lot of emails at a certain time of day, or people kind of wander into your office.

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You may find that those are good times to schedule the tasks that require a lot less energy. So those things that you could do in your sleep. Maybe it's just checking your emails or dealing with invoices or recording your time or having phone calls about administrative issues. Things that don't require a lot of focus, those can go in those other time slots.

I also like to put meetings with people in those time slots. Not because I don't want to focus on them, but because I find the stimulation of being engaged in a conversation brings my energy levels back up. So I schedule my meetings in the afternoon because now I've completed all my hard thinking tasks, but I get to spend my energy engaging with other people. So that might also be something that works for you.

The third scheduling hack that I'd like to offer is using anchors. What I mean by anchors is to plan around events that naturally occur for you in your day. So most of us would agree that we wake up at a certain time or we wake up and we go to sleep. A lot of us have lunch in the middle of the day. If you have children like me, you have drop offs in the morning, you have pickups in the evening, and you have routines around both of those activities.

The anchors are what occur in your day no matter what. The beauty of looking at them as you schedule is that you can use them to create pockets of time where you can achieve certain tasks. So, for example, you might plan your thinking task between when you drop off your kids and when you sit down to have lunch. You get yourself a block of time. It's going to look different for you. I'm sort of borrowing from my own life.

Having those sorts of anchors in place, it breaks up your day so you're not looking at this overwhelming stretch of time where you somehow have to fit everything in. You're dealing with natural anchors. So that gives you a little bit more structure.

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Finally, and somewhat related, is putting white space into your day. Now I think for a lot of us and a lot of you, building in white space seems totally counterintuitive because what you're really focused on is getting your work done, getting your billable hours recorded, and making sure that you're getting results for your client. Now, the idea of scheduling in a walk around the block or a conversation with a friend, that might just seem like a waste of time for you. What I'd invite you to consider is that it can actually help you in a number of ways.

First of all, it can actually help you create more balance in your day so your days are more enjoyable, which is wonderful for your longevity. Longevity of your career and also living a more joyful life. Secondly, when you take a break away from your work, that allows your brain to relax a little bit. You're not constantly thinking. Giving yourself that space can actually make you more productive when you return to the task that you're on.

I invite you to think about times where that's happened to you. Where you've maybe been working on something and it's really complex. You find yourself getting really exhausted by it. So you take a break. Maybe you go for a walk around the block, or you go to grab a coffee, or you go and chat with a colleague for a few minutes. Then when you come back to that task, you all of a sudden have a new idea. You feel more inspired. You have renewed energy. So building those white spaces into your day actually creates more productivity when you are sitting down to do your work.

Finally, this is something that I really find works well for me. Is when I have a white space locked into my calendar, let's say it's a walk with a friend or a phone call with a friend. The fact that I have to work—Let's say that that's a 2:00 appointment. If I'm working on something and I started at 1:00 and I know I've got that hour to do it, it really motivates me to get everything done before that 2:00 appointment. So I'm more incentivized to be efficient, to be creative, and to get over some of my perfectionistic tendencies to get that job done.

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The next tip I have for you is to plan for the invisible roadblocks. Now, if you have imagined your to do list, you can see there are items that are clearly identified that are going to occupy your time. There are a few items that lurk on your to do list without you ever seeing them. I'm going to identify three of them. I know there's more than this.

The first is procrastination. We have all experienced this. If you procrastinate, you are not alone and there is no shame in it. But it doesn't have to be that way. So procrastination shows up when you sit down to a task, and you just find that you're unable to motivate yourself to do it.

Maybe you have a blank document in front of you, and you kind of go and think, "Oh I really should check on my email. Or this would be so much more pleasant if I had a nice coffee and a sweet treat to eat." Or maybe you think, "You know, I would really like to get started on this, but this is a big task and I only have 15 minutes. I really should put this off to tomorrow because I'm going to have more time." Or maybe it's one of those emails that you're writing to opposing counsel where you can just imagine them receiving your email and tearing it to shreds, and you just don't want to do it.

There are a lot of times where you may procrastinate in your practice. It may be happening at quite an unconscious level. So what I'd like you to think about when you're scheduling in throughout your workday is whether or not procrastination is creeping up on you.

Another invisible roadblock on your to do list is perfectionism. This shows up in a couple of ways at least. One of them is procrastination. Putting off that task because you just don't think you'll be able to do it perfectly. This is something that I hear a lot from my clients. They have a written assignment that they know they need to start working on. The deadline is looming, but they're afraid of putting that first sentence down on paper because they

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know it's not going to be perfect. That's one way that you can lose time through perfectionism.

Another is when you've done the tasks or you're in the task, but you slow yourself down by obsessing over getting every detail right or perfect. You may have written a beautiful submission, and now you're reading it over several times and fighting over internally in your own mind what the punctuation looks like. Or is the language perfect?

In those cases, I would invite you to start asking yourself how much you're moving that file forward by really getting so granular about really the nuances, the minute. So that's another area where a lot of lawyers lose time, and it might be somewhere that you might be losing time as well.

The third invisible roadblock that I'll talk about today is people pleasing. This comes up when somebody comes by your office, and they ask you to do something. It's not really urgent. It may not be on a file that you're actively working on, but you say yes to it, or you allow yourself to be in that situation because you're not comfortable saying no to that person. If you add those events up, you may find that they're actually taking a lot of time away from your workday.

So another thing I'd ask you to look out for is where are the situations that you are people pleasing and losing time in your workday? Another example that comes to mind is in your emails. Where you have an email come in from a client. You look at the email, and you know it's not urgent. You know you can respond to it later and still be serving your client adequately. However, you really want to feel like a good lawyer. Somebody who's very responsive to your client.

So you put that email at a higher priority than the task that you may have been currently working on. So that might throw off your workday a little bit. You have that instant gratification of having served your client. They may

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be happy. They probably give you positive rewards for that. However, you would need to start asking yourself what it's costing you in terms of being able to manage your time better.

We have three more tips that I'm going to walk you through. The next one is follow through. This is one that I think is really, really important. As you start to develop a practice of having a calendar, creating a schedule, and having an idea of what you're going to do during the day is I would invite you to have a practice of following through on the commitments that you make.

This is important, obviously, for the commitments that you make to others. Doing that is an easy way of establishing trust with other people. When you commit to doing something and you do that thing you committed to on time, that builds trust with somebody. I mentioned in my podcast last week that I was on the end of that when it came to a filing that I had in relation to my business. The person that I had asked to help me with that disappeared on me. It was very stressful because I was getting very close to the deadline, and I didn't know whether or not I was going to be able to file my materials on time.

If you've ever been on the receiving end of that, you know the anxiety that that can produce. It might happen in your practice. You may be relying on others. Maybe it's some of your support staff. Maybe it's other lawyers to deliver products or work products to you that you then will be using in relation to another deadline that falls on your shoulders. When you don't have those things, it can be really unsettling. So as much as you can, you want to be somebody who lives up to your end of the commitment with others and develops that relationship with them.

Equally important in my view is honoring the commitments that you make to yourself. So going back to your schedule and talking about, for example, white space. If you had told yourself that you are going to take a walk in the

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afternoon at 2:00 p.m. 2:00 p.m. rolls around, and you're in the middle of something. You think, "I'm just going to skip my walk today. I'm not going to do that." I would really invite you to reconsider that decision.

Because what you want to do is to develop a practice where you know that if you commit to doing something, you're going to do it. That will give you peace of mind when it comes to creating your schedule that you know that when something goes on your calendar that you are going to follow through on it. That trust that you have that you will develop with yourself will allow you to have more ease. It will allow you to have more confidence that you are going to be able to manage your time in a way that comes from a place of control as opposed to a place of reactivity.

The next tip that I'd like to offer is to adapt as you go. So this is all great. I'm sure you're saying, "Okay Paula. These are some tips. I'm going to try this, and we're going to see how it goes. But I don't think that any of these tips are going to work for me." That's fine. That is totally fine.

If you pick up two or three of these tips and start implementing them into your practice and you start to see results, amazing. I will consider those to have been a big success. But I invite you to think about as you're developing your time management practice, your strategies, your systems, whatever that looks like for you is that you do not need to hold yourself to a standard of perfection. There's no one way to do time management.

In your own life, this is really going to evolve over time. So the way that your life looked five years ago probably looks quite different from today, which will look different five years from now. What I would invite you to do is adapt as you go.

So maybe it's on your Friday afternoon check-ins. Maybe you're looking back over the course of the week and thinking, "These systems really worked for me. Sitting down and having a schedule, that helps me see the

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big picture. That helps me create a lot of efficiencies. I was able to use my time more efficiently because I scheduled all my hard tasks in that very early stage of the day before anybody's sending me emails. I got so much more done. I felt so good.”

The idea here is to really look at what's working in your time management practice and build on that. You'll find that the more you do that, the more you'll be able to refine your systems. You'll be able to adapt your systems to however your practice is evolving, and you will feel really good. The better you feel, the more confidence you're going to have in your systems, the more you're going to feel in control of your practice.

Now you can also look at the elements of the systems that don't really work for you. So you might say that some of these tips aren't really working for you. If that's the case, then I would invite you to think about how you might be able to work for you. Or maybe double down in some other area to help you create a practice that really does work for you.

Finally, the last tip that I have to offer for you is to be kind to yourself. Really be kind to yourself. I think as a lawyer, as a high achiever, as somebody who devotes herself to the service of others, you really do have high standards. I would invite you to be gentle when it comes to yourself, when it comes to your time management systems. To really give yourself the grace to test and to try and to experiment and to see how things go, and to not put the pressure on yourself to do everything perfectly all at once.

If you do a little bit every week, if you try a little bit every week and you manage to make small steps and progress, over time you will find yourself developing a practice that is ideal for you. Going back to those initial bullet points that you created, this idea of the practice, your ideal time management system. You will find yourself moving closer to that ideal as long as you keep up the work.

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So those are my tips for you this week. It has been such a pleasure to share them with you. A quick recap. The eight tools that I offered were to number one, look at your goals, look at your values, and create a bullet point list of ideals that you want to work toward in your own time management system. The second is to schedule time for you to create your schedule, to create your calendar every week.

The third is to take all the different action items that you have that are in your mind, in your brain, and to put them down on paper so you can see them and organize them and schedule them. The fourth is to practice the art of scheduling. So looking at when you have your best energy, matching your tasks to your energy, looking at the natural anchors in your day and scheduling around them. Creating white space so that you have a bit of downtime, something to look forward to.

Number five is to plan for the invisible roadblocks. Those were procrastination, perfectionism, and people pleasing. Six was practicing following through. So building that trust with others, building that trust with yourself that you will do what you say you're going to do when you say you're going to do it. Number seven was to adapt as you go. So not getting too fixated on having the perfect system right away, but to letting your time management practice evolve over time.

Finally, being kind to yourself. So please don't beat yourself up. Maybe you have a terrible week and nothing's really going your way. You're stressed and running behind schedule the whole time. But there's one thing you did better this week that you didn't do last week. Give yourself a pat on the back for that and figure out how you're going to strategize moving forward.

So thank you again for joining me. It has been such a pleasure having you here. If you have any wins that you would like to share with me or any questions, please feel free to reach out. I'd be delighted to connect with

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you. I am so excited to connect with you again next week. Thanks again for tuning in. Bye for now.

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