Getting Things Done: Overcoming Stress and Managing Productivity

Presented By:

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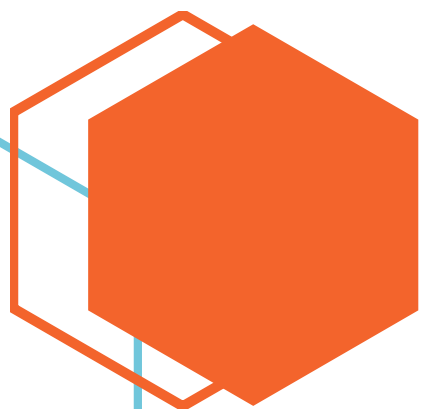## Executive Director
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Danielle M. Hall, Executive Director
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STRESS, BURNOUT, AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Burnout vs. Stress

Burnout has become such a familiar term that it's common to hear people casually say, "Oh, I'm so burned out," when they're merely referring to a bad day or a bad week. But for those who truly are burned out, it is much more than a bad day or a bad week. It's a problem that significantly interferes with one's health, happiness, and overall quality of life.

Stress, on the other hand is a general feeling of emotional or physical tension. It is a normal reaction in the body. In fact, the body is designed to experience stress and react to it. Stress can at times be positive. For example, if you have something significant you are working on and it is due, a stress response might help the body work harder and stay awake longer. Some go as far as saying stress can even be good for us in small doses. When stress, however, begins to continue without periods of relief, that is when it can be dangerous and lead to other emotional and physical concerns. Stress exists on a continuum, and it's important to know your place on it as you get more work, finish projects, meet with clients, and generally go about your day. If not, chronic workplace stress can lead you down a path to burnout.

The term "burnout" was coined in the 1970s by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger. He used it to describe the consequences of severe stress and high ideals in "helping" professions. Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It can negatively affect both your work and your life. As the stress continues, you begin to lose the interest or motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place.

There are many contributing factors that can lead to burnout. Work-related causes of burnout can include:

- Feeling like you have little or no control over your work

- Lack of recognition or rewards for good work

- Unclear or overly demanding job expectations

- Doing work that's monotonous or unchallenging

- Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment

Burnout is a gradual process, however, that occurs over an extended period. It doesn't happen overnight, but it can creep up on you if you're not paying attention to the warning signals. The signs

and symptoms of burnout are subtle at first, but they get more pronounced as time goes on. Here are the signs and symptoms to watch out for:

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral
Feeling tired and drained most of the time Lowered immunity, feeling sick a lot Frequent headaches (migraines), back pain, muscle aches Change in appetite or sleep habits	Sense of failure and self-doubt Feeling helpless, trapped, and defeated Detachment, feeling alone in the world Loss of motivation Increasingly cynical and negative outlook Decreased satisfaction and sense of accomplishment	Withdrawing from responsibilities Isolating from others Procrastinating, taking longer to get things done Using food, drugs, or alcohol to cope Taking out frustrations on others Skipping work or coming in late and leaving early

If you can relate to any of these signs and symptoms and are wondering if you might be suffering from burnout, here is an easy test you can try. The first step is to completely commit to treating yourself to a relaxing, stress-free weekend. Try to sleep in both days. Eat right. Occupy your time with relaxing activities that you rarely allow yourself to enjoy. Whatever you do, it is important that you fully commit to relaxing. If on Monday morning, you wake up tired and dreading your day, you may be suffering from burnout. The next step is to take more time off, remove all the stressors, and add stress reducers. If after you take a longer vacation—a week or even two weeks—and you are still dreading going into the office and are waking up tired, it is likely time you seek professional help and make significant changes for your well-being.

The key to dealing with stress and preventing burnout out is to implement coping strategies that allow you to effectively handle stress when it comes your way. Building your resiliency skills is also imperative to your overall wellness. Additionally, adopting healthy habits and practices are important. Lastly, setting boundaries can help you to achieve a better work-life balance, ultimately reducing your stress.

Work-Life Balance

Simply put, work-life balance is a state where a person equally prioritizes the demands of one's career and the demands of one's personal life. Obtaining work-life balance is important to help lawyers stay healthy and engaged in their work. Balance, however, can mean different things for different people. For some, work is everything. While for others work is good but spending time with family and friends is more important. Some of us want time to focus on activities that bring us enjoyment, such as reading, art, or music. Some of us want more time to focus on our physical health through exercise. Others may just need more time for rest and relaxation. Ultimately, it is important to figure out what's important to you before determining what work-life balance means for you.

> **"Work-life balance is equally prioritizing the demands of one's career and the demands of one's personal life."**

Depending on where you are professionally, achieving a work-life balance may seem hard and unrealistic, but it is important. If you are teetering and fail to find some level of work-life balance, consequences may follow. Some of these consequences can include:

- Fatigue – If you are in a state of being constantly tired, then your ability to work productively and think clearly may be reduced over time. Fatigue can also affect your ability to competently represent your clients and mistakes can occur.

- Lost Time – If you are struggling to find balance, you might feel as though you have lost time with your loved ones. Maybe you missed milestones with your children. You might also feel like you have lost time to do the activities that bring you enjoyment.

- Increased Expectations – Working extra or odd hours may lead to increased expectations or responsibilities. Keep in mind that once you have established a pattern, it is often harder to reverse course.

- Physical Health Risks – if you are struggling to find work-life balance, chances are you are feeling stressed and you might also be getting less sleep since there is a direct correlation between stress and sleep. If so, your physical health can certainly be impacted. Studies show that stress and a lack of sleep can lead to conditions such as stroke and heart disease.

- Mental Health Risks – Just as with an increased risk to your physical health, a work-life imbalance can also lead to an increased risk to your mental health. Work-life imbalance can lead to stress, burnout, and an increased risk for depression and anxiety.

- Negative Effects on Relationships – In addition to feeling like you have lost time with your loved ones, a work-life imbalance can also lead to strains on your relationships.

Knowing that it is important for our overall health and well-being, you might now be thinking how do we *actually* achieve a work-life balance? First, start thinking about this in terms of work-life harmony, rather than balance. Sometimes, we deem balance to mean 50/50. For most, 50/50 is not always going to be attainable and when it doesn't happen, we let our perfectionist brains take over and then we get disappointed and feel as though we failed. Then we give up as we start feeling it isn't possible. By thinking about achieving work-life harmony, we allow ourselves some room to breathe. Our schedules will ebb and flow. Some weeks will be better than others, but ideally, we should be in a state of harmony with our work and with our life outside of work. Additionally, identifying what work-life balance (or harmony) looks like for you is important. What it is for me, may be something completely different for you.

After we define what work-life balance looks like, then you start setting boundaries and minimizing interruptions throughout your day, both of which should lead to taking back your calendar and most importantly your time. Once your boundaries are set, however, you must then stick with them. Otherwise, your boundaries may quickly go out the window. For example, if you set a communication boundary establishing you will not answer emails after 7 p.m., but then begin to answer a client's emails after 7 p.m. on a few select nights, those few nights can quickly become every night. The client's expectations will change and the next thing you know you have no boundaries with this client. So, keep this in mind, setting a boundary and then not enforcing it is to have no boundary at all.

OVERCOMING WORK RELATED STRESS

Cross Examine Your Own Thinking

Stress can be caused by several different factors. Many of these factors can be obvious ones, such as a difficult project at work, making a financial decision, or getting into an argument with someone. But stress can also be caused by less obvious factors, such as negative thoughts and feelings. You might not even notice you are having these feelings. We all give power to our thoughts, both positive and negative. Those thoughts lead to emotions and then to actions (or inaction). Sometimes, we just need to cross-examine our thinking to shift our outlook. This shift can help with producing better results, including getting things done.

The next time you are stressed and overwhelmed at work, I want you to think about these five components: Circumstances, Thoughts, Feelings, Actions, and Results.

- Circumstances – Circumstance include events that happen, things people say, and actions people take. Circumstances are often beyond our control. They are measurable facts, free from qualifiers.

- Thoughts – Thoughts can be positive or negative. They either serve you, or they do not. Our thoughts often give meaning to our circumstances.

- Feelings – Feelings are one-word emotions that we experience as vibrations through our bodies. Much like your thoughts, feelings can be either positive or negative. Your feelings are experienced in response to your thinking.

- Actions – Simply put, actions are the behaviors you take or don't take based upon your feelings. These actions can be put into three categories: overt action, reaction, and inaction.

- Results – Results are the effects of your actions.

First, it's important to recognize what you can and can't control under any given circumstance. When you begin focusing your time and energy only on things you can control—and stop worrying about what you can't— it can help you feel better about a situation or circumstance, because you spend your efforts only on what you can change or impact.

A lot of this, however, comes down to shifting the way we think about circumstances, especially when our minds go to the worst of the worst thoughts. It's often those thoughts that begin to make us feel stressed and maybe even anxious. So, ask yourself 1) is this thought true, and 2) why am I choosing this thought?

We might often think it is a particular circumstance that causes a feeling, when in fact it is our thoughts about that circumstance that is causing the feeling. These feelings can then dictate your actions, so if your thinking a negative thought and feeling a negative feeling, you will then react negatively. You might also take no action—think procrastination.

Often, when we are avoiding a particular task or circumstance, it is not the task or circumstance we are avoiding. Instead, it is the feelings we are trying to avoid. In these instances, we need to shift our thoughts about the circumstance or task from negative to positive, if we want positive results. This concept even applies to the work we are avoiding.

Eliminating Distractions

Distractions—they seem to be everywhere, especially in our hyper-connected world. We are all familiar with what our distractions are and we all more than likely loathe them. While our distractions may be different in nature, they happen daily for many us and can be our biggest productivity killer.

A 2016 CareerBuilder survey identified cell phones and texting as the biggest distraction and productivity killer at work. The next biggest distraction? The internet. Also making the list, social media and email. Of the employers who took the survey, over half reported their companies losing between one and two hours of productivity a day because of distracted employees.

In 2017, researchers at The McCombs School of Business at The University of Texas at Austin released a study comprised from a series of experiments that were conducted on 800 smartphone users in an attempt to measure how well people complete tasks when their phones are nearby. Researchers asked participants to perform a concentration test in four different scenarios: with their smartphone in their pocket, on their desk, locked away in a drawer, and in another room. Test results were lowest when the smartphone was on the desk, but with every additional layer of distance between participants and their smartphones, test performance increased. Overall, test results were 26 percent higher when phones were removed from the room entirely. The key takeaway finding from the study, however, is that your cognitive capacity is significantly reduced when your smartphone is within reach—even if it is off.

In addition to the cellphone, email can be a leading cause of distraction for many. According the Harvard Business Review, the average professional spends 28% of the workday reading and answering email. That can amount to 2.6 and 120 messages received per day. This just might be the reason so many lawyers report email as a number one contributor to stress and frustration.

I addition to email, several digital work tools are now available on our phones, desktops, and watches leaving us vulnerable to distraction. These tools or apps encourage us to graze from item to item as we switch back and forth. In fact, it is reported by ZDNet.com, 68% of workers switch apps 10 times an hour. It is surprising that any of us get anything done. Research shows that even the smallest distractions can cause a person to take longer to complete a task. Not only does it extend the length of time it takes to complete tasks, but it can also decrease the quality of their work.

Reducing Clutter

Research tells that us that our physical environment in our workplace has a significant effect on the way we work. If we think about this logically it makes it sense. If you can't find something on your desk, you spend precious time looking for it. That of course is an example of how clutter can affect you directly, but there are also indirect ways it can affect us.

Research recently highlighted by the Harvard Business Review shows that our physical environments can also influence our cognition, emotions, and behavior. Your environment can also affect your anxiety levels, sleep, and productivity levels. So, what does this mean for your work? Scientists at the Princeton University Neuroscience Institute have used fMRI and other approaches to show that our brains like order and constant visual reminders of disorganization drain our cognitive resources and reduce our ability to focus. They also found that when participants cleared clutter from their work environment, they were better able to focus and process information and their productivity increased.

In their book, *How to Do More in Less Time*, law practice management and technology experts Allison Shields and Daniel Seigel point out, clutter:

- wastes time;
- wastes money;
- creates distraction;
- waste energy; and
- can be scary.

When I read that last one—clutter can be scary—it caught my attention. As I thought about this, it makes sense. I talk to so many lawyers who have said, "things just piled up and I didn't know where to start, so I just walked away." The problem is leaving those piles unattended can lead to issues later, possibly even ethical violations. In their book, Shields and Seigel explain the piles on your desk can seem daunting. You might not know what lies within and that can be scary. You can't, however, continue to ignore those piles. This is not an out of sight out of mind circumstance. The more you let pile up, the scarier it can get, and the more distraction it can also cause. Putting a plan in place to tackle the clutter (and the piles) can assist you in ultimately alleviating the distraction and avoid further problems down the road.

SHALLOW VS. DEEP WORK

The concepts of shallow work and deep work come from productivity expert and Georgetown University professor, Cal Newport. Newport published a book titled *Deep Work: Rules for Focused*

Success in a Distracted World. In the book, he explains the two types of work. Here are brief explanations:

- Shallow Work – Non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value and are easy to replicate.

- Deep Work – professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts can improve your skills.

There is an obvious parallel between deep work and the work we do as lawyers. For instance, items such as writing briefs and motions or preparing for a hearing or trial are prime examples of the deep work we do. We also do shallow work, however, that distracts us from the deep work. For instance, rapid fire communication, social media, and basic busy tasks often serves as a proxy for productivity. To some degree the technology that we rely upon—especially in the form of emails—has the potential to interfere with the actual work of lawyering. If you have ever asked yourself, "Where has my day gone and what do I have to show for it?" Chances are, you fell victim to shallow work.

So, what happens when you go back and forth throughout your day between the shallow and deep work? This cognitive switching is absolutely draining. Draining on your time and draining on your energy. It also doesn't equate to increased productivity. Think about your brain for a second and the havoc this cognitive switching can wreak on an individual. To grasp this concept, I ask you to think about your brain like a computer. A computer processes information and preforms specific tasks. What happens to computers when we have multiple programs running, multiple tabs open, and are running things in the background? More than likely it will start to eventually run at a slower pace. It might even stop working properly all together if we continue to push the machine in this manner. The same thing can happen to you unless you make changes and operate differently.

The good news is that deep work isn't about working harder or longer. Instead, it is about working smarter, being less reactive, and changing the focus of your schedule to prioritize the highest value tasks. Focusing on deep work means you are intentional about how you spend your time. You stop working in a state of perpetual distraction.

There are great benefits to developing your skill sets to focus on deep work. Not only does it do the obvious—increase your productive and focus—but it also provides other benefits. First, it is a skill set that seems hard to come by nowadays and as a result, makes you a highly marketable worker. Additionally, you will improve your overall satisfaction at work and improve your sense of self. Having

the ability to accomplish difficult and meaningful tasks can lead to an increased sense of self-value, which ultimately leads to more feelings of happiness and having purpose.

TIME MANAGEMENT

According to Mindtools, time management is the process of organizing and planning how to divide your time between specific activities. Good time management enables you to work smarter – not harder – so that you get more done in less time, even when time is tight, and pressures are high. Time management, however, seems to be one area many lawyers struggle with. Part of the reason is those distractions we discuss above. To some degree, it is also affected by our inability to set boundaries with others to stick to the schedules we promise ourselves.

Having poor time management skills can also affect your ethical obligations. When I worked for the Kansas Office of the Disciplinary Administrator, we saw many instances of poor time management and organizational skills playing a role in violations. I particularly noted time management skills can affect our abilities to adhere to our duty of:

• Competence –KRPC 1.1 states, "A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation.

• Diligence – KRPC 1.3 states, "A lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client."

• Communication – KRPC 1.4 states, "A lawyer shall keep a client reasonably informed about the status of a matter and promptly comply with reasonable requests for information."

These rules collectively suggest lawyers should exercise time management skills to meet their obligations to their clients. Comment [2] to KRPC 1.3, takes it a step further by stating, "Perhaps no professional shortcoming is more widely resented than procrastination. A client's interests often can be adversely affected by the passage of time or the change of conditions…"

In addition to meeting your baseline obligations, lawyers who are organized and have good time management skills are likely to work more productively and utilize their other skill sets more effectively. Ultimately, having good time management skills leads to better client service and increases in your bottom line.

Time Management Techniques

If you find yourself struggling to stay on top of things, implementing a time management technique can useful. Something to remember, however, is this is not a one size fit all sort of situation. Sometimes, finding the right time management technique takes trial and error until you find one that works specifically for you. Below you will find a few of my favorite techniques followed by other time management tips and tools to try.

The Pomodoro Technique

This time management method was developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s and is named after the tomato-shaped kitchen timer which was used by Cirillo as a university student. (Pomodoro is Italian for tomato.) The idea behind the technique is simple: you set a timer for 25 minutes and work on only one thing for the duration of that time. When the timer rings, you reward yourself with a short break. This technique forces you to focus on that one task for a set period, while taking breaks to avoid mental fatigue. For instance, rather than working on a brief until it is "done,” you work on it until your 25 minutes is up. Then, you get up and stretch (or whatever else you like to do on a break) for 5 minutes. Once your break is over, you go back to working on the brief for another 25 minutes, and so on, until you complete 4 pomodoros (25-minute segments). After completing 4 pomodoros, you take a longer 20-30 break.

The goal should be to work towards task completion to meet your daily goals. As a result, first you will need to create a prioritized task list to determine what your workday will include. Using the task list and implementing the Pomodoro Technique should help you to avoid interruptions and distractions while improving your concentration. The more you can concentrate, the more work you should be able to complete. The key, however, is to not fall victim to checking your email, looking at social media, or chitchatting during the pomodoro.

If you want to try implementing this simple time management technique, here is quick recap:

- Pick a task.
- Set a time to 25 minutes and focus on that task for the entire 25 minutes.
- When the 25 minutes is up, take a short 3-5 min break.
- After 4 pomodoros, take a longer 20-30 min break.

A kitchen timer (or Google's Built-in Timer) will do the trick, but if you are looking for something more hi-tech to use, there are plenty of Pomodoro

Technique apps out there for both Apple and Android devices. There are also Chrome apps available to use with your Chrome web browser, some of which allow you to block websites during use.

Here are a few apps:

- PomoDone (Web, Mac, Windows, Linux, iOS, Android)
- Focus Booster (Web, Mac, Windows, iOS, Android)
- Focus To-Do: Pomodoro Timer & To Do List (Mac, Windows, iOS, Android)
- Focus Keeper (iOS)
- Pomodor (Web)
- Pomofocus (Web)

To read more about the Pomodoro Technique visit https://francescocirillo.com/pages/pomodoro-technique.

The Quadrant Method

This time management method developed by speaker and author, Stephen Covey. The quadrant method takes your linear to-do list and asks you to split the items up into two buckets: what's important and what is not. From there you split the tasks even further into what is due soon and what is due later. Here is what should be included in each of your quadrants:

- **Quadrant 1** would include only those activities that need your immediate attention. This space should stay reserved for emergencies and extremely important deadlines. When you start your day, you know where to work first: the upper left corner in Quadrant 1.

- **Quadrant 2** should be comprised of things that are important to you and your business but need not be done until a later date. A good example for this quadrant would be something like strategic planning.

- **Quadrant 3** would contain items that are more than likely interruptions in your day. Items like emails, phone calls, some meetings. Setting aside a time to specifically handle these interruptions at one time should save you some time in your day and allow you to focus on Quadrant 1 tasks. Delegation may also be an option for some of your Quadrant 3 tasks.

- **Quadrant 4** activities are those that waste your time and offer no value. These are the tasks you want to eliminate. Think: surfing the internet or social media.

Here is a sample:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Quadrant 1 • Crisis • Pressing problems • Deadline driven projects • Last minute preparation Strategy: Just Do It Key Action: Manage	Quadrant 2 • Relationship building • Finding new opportunities • Long-term planning • Preventive activities • Preparation and planning Strategy: Schedule It Key Action: Focus
Not Important	Quadrant 3 • Interruptions • Distractions • Certain emails, calls, meetings • Urgency masquerading as importance Strategy: Delegate or Push Back Key Action: Use Caution	Quadrant 4 • Time wasters (but maybe pleasant) • Busy work • Escapist activities • Mindless activities – surfing the net Strategy: Don't Do It Key Action: Avoid

You should find that most of your time is spent in Quadrants 1 and 3; however, having a more organized and prioritized list should open time in your schedule to work on Quadrant 2 tasks, allowing time to focus on items that enhance your skills and your business.

Calendar Blocking

Calendar Blocking is a relatively simple time management technique. Essentially, you take your calendar and block out every hour to totally coordinate your day. Do you have a brief or motion to work on? Block that out on the calendar to ensure you have designated time to work on it. Would you like to exercise more? Block it out on the calendar. Do you have meetings? Of course, get those on the calendar, too. The other key to calendar blocking is setting aside time in your day to deal with the distractions (or chaos). For instance, block out time that you will dedicate to responding to emails and phone calls.

Why do I like calendar blocking so much? It allows you to take your calendar back. Too often, we allow others to dictate *our* calendars in their entirety. If you always find yourself in a state of responsiveness to others, calendar blocking might be the right time management technique to try.

To learn more about calendar blocking visit:

- [Build the life you want to build with a block schedule part 1](#) from Solo Practice University.
- [Build the life you want to build with a block schedule part 2](#) from Solo Practice University.

Other Time Management Tips and Tools

- **Use a calendar** – There are few things to keep in mind with your calendar: 1) consider using a macro and a micro calendar to get a clearer picture of your schedule and what is to come; 2) consider using time blocks on your calendar; and 3) make some room on your calendar as it shouldn't all be filled with entries.
- **Make to-do lists** – If a daily list seems overwhelming and never-ending, consider the power of three. In their book, Shields and Daniels recommends instead of focusing on your entire to-do list, use the power of three to help you prioritize. A few examples include choosing three big goals where each of those big goals with have objectives or many action steps to give you a list of to-dos. The other thing you can do is identify your top three tasks on your list, focus your energy on completing those items. This can result in a sense of accomplishment when you complete the three tasks, despite having other items left on the list.
- **Make to-don't lists** – a to-don't list is your list of tasks you are going to stay away from or delegate. If you are constantly giving in to the distractions, having a to-don't list can serve as a reminder about what to stay away from.
- **Don't answer email first things in the morning** – There is a simple and logical explanation for this recommendation. When you start your day by answering emails you are starting with other people's problems or tasks, rather than your own. If possible, spend the first hour of the day focusing on something you need to accomplish. This will allow you to take ownership of your day, rather than being so responsive to others. Also, consider blocking of time on your calendar specifically for email, this will allow you to eliminate it as a distraction.
- **Delegate when appropriate** – You don't need to do everything! I know that comes as a shocker, but it is true. Some of the most successful leaders are those who know how to appropriately delegate throughout the day. Find the tasks or the distractions that you can delegate to others and let them help you. This will also let you focus on the higher-level work you need to get done.
- **Eliminate clutter** – As we discussed the above, organization and time management go hand and hand. Part of the process of getting rid of the clutter is implementing some organization and/or processes within your practice. For instance, if you have a paper clutter problem, you might want to implement a scanning process for documents. Is the mail piling up? Then you might need to implement some processes for opening mail. Once you implement processes, start eliminating the clutter. This comes down to sorting it and clearing it out.

- **Have processes in place** – A lack of processes can create chaos, so find key areas that you can streamline. For instance, do you have a process for client intake, file retention and destruction, and billing. Start by making a list of your current processes and ask yourself are you doing those well. Note any major problems areas you need to address.

- **Utilize technology** – Technology can be a great ally in managing your schedule. There are many different applications out there that can set appoints, send you reminders, sync with your calendar, or manage a project. The most important thing is finding the technology that works best for you. Just like time management techniques, technology is not a one size fits all. I would recommend, if given the opportunity, take a test drive of the application before committing long term. The last thing I will mention about technology is that increasing your skill sets with the technology will go a long way with eliminating issues that waste time. Additionally, our ethical rules remind us that we have a duty to be competent with our use of technology per Comment [8] of KRPC 1.1.

- **Leave time for self-care** – You need a break and that is OK. We are not robots and we should not expect ourselves to be. An important aspect for productivity includes leaving time for self-care. Sleep, rest, and taking breaks will improve your focus and concentration, enabling you to complete your work more efficiently. Research has shown all-nighters to be counterproductive, so give yourself permission to take breaks to re-energize. Eating well and exercise can give you the boost you need to get through your task.