



Learn when to be inefficient

Certain tasks in our practice are better served when we work inefficiently

BY CONOR GRANAHAN

We spend time trying to be efficient, but what are we going to do with that saved time? Efficiency means getting something done with the least amount of time and effort. We should strive to scale our practices to get efficient for the repetitive tasks through templates, technology, delegation, and outsourcing. But then spend that saved time being “inefficient” with the things that you value and that you want to build with a compounding effect.

I use inefficient time in three ways. First, time signaling demonstrates who and what I value. Second, I spend extra time to learn deeply. And third, inefficient time is to have fun.

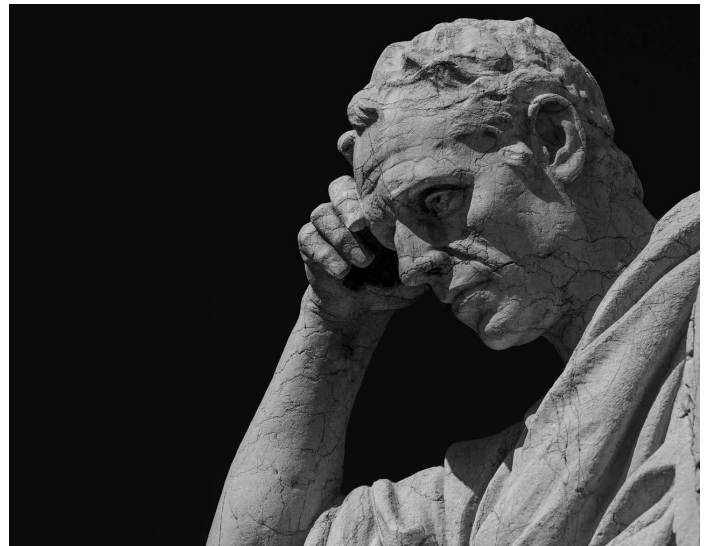
For time signaling, who I spend time with and what I focus on shows what I value. Building a relationship isn’t about efficiency. In my cases, I like to spend time talking to the people involved. We have all done countless intakes and deposition preparation sessions, but the client has not, and he or she needs time to explain what happened to them, to understand the process, and to feel heard. I do my best to slow it down, to listen to my clients, to acknowledge their concerns, and to show them that I appreciate them, not just their business. We represent individuals, so this is our opportunity to use this to our advantage and build an early rapport. The time spent compounds later and pays off if the client trusts me when it’s time to counsel them about an important decision.

I like to speak with opposing counsel instead of just emailing or delegating so I know who is on the other side of the case. Even an initial phone call about mutual contacts or the basic facts of the case are helpful foundations. Not only does this demonstrate to the other side that you know your case, it also helps when dealing with issues that arise later or to facilitate settlement discussions. I am not calling for the first time when I need something. And ultimately, when it comes time to explain the case to a mediator, a judge, or a jury, I know the people involved and speak intelligently on their behalf and about what has happened in the case.

Get efficient with in-house meetings about routine tasks such as what documents to subpoena. Use that saved time to be inefficient when meeting to prepare for a deposition. Get creative with the questions and the sequence of exhibits and drafting your Rules of the Road questions.

Get inefficient – it’s why they hire us

Second, I get inefficient when I work deeply on the facts of the case. Summaries and software help, but I need to sit down with the documents and spread them out to understand what is



going on, such as with disputed liability or complex medical causation. I use my saved time to craft the theory of my case, which is the creative work of putting it all together. You can get more efficient, but you cannot fully delegate or automate this work. This is the lawyer’s craft that we get hired for.

Likewise, it is the work I admire from others. I appreciate the time and effort that goes into craftsmanship in the trades, in the food industry, or the wine industry. Mass-produced products, like discovery templates, have their place. But we know the true craft when we see it.

Third, inefficiency is the fun way to spend time. Why get efficient at something in the first place? To do other things. As plaintiffs’ attorneys, we don’t bill by the hour, so not every hour is equal. Leverage that balance of efficient and inefficient time to get out of the office and go for a walk or a bike ride or spend time with friends and family. I won’t ever talk about how “efficient” a dinner I had out with loved ones. I hope you can take something from this idea to become inefficient in the best possible way for you.

Conor Granahan is the principal of Granahan Law, with offices in San Francisco and Marin. He handles personal injury, employment, and landlord tenant matters. He is a member of AAJ, CAOC, SFTLA, and Justice HQ, a network of consumer advocate attorneys. He can be reached at conor@granahanlegal.com.



Granahan