

The Creative Lawyer? Who Has Time?

By Sharon Good

You don't hear the words "creative" and "lawyer" in the same sentence very often. The restrictions and expectations of the legal profession tend to leave a lawyer with little room for creativity, especially young lawyers who are busy establishing their careers. Yet, contrary to the common perception of lawyers as professionals solely focused on their careers, many lawyers are multifaceted individuals with artistic and legal talents.

If you're a lawyer with a creative talent or interest and you never take the time express this creative energy, you may feel like something is missing in your life. Below are suggestions for incorporating some creativity into your overly busy life. Take your pick!

Be creative in short bursts. Take a quick lunch in the park and do some sketching, take photographs, or write a poem. Carry a small sketch book, digital camera, or notebook in your briefcase to be prepared to be creative when time permits.

Start or end your day with creativity. Some people find it hard to switch from their analytic left brain to their creative right brain and back again in the middle of a day. Before work or before bedtime are good times to write, dance, paint, or practice your music.

Use those spare minutes. While waiting for your case to be called at court or while commuting, use that time creatively instead of chatting or reading a magazine. Make sure you're fully prepared with your case, and then try to tune out what's going on around. It may be hard to focus on writing something new at such moments, but you can edit something you've written, capture new ideas, do Internet research, memorize lines, or write a blog entry.

Take a class. Search the Internet to find out what creative courses your local schools offer. You can perform in community theatre, sing in a choir, or take a painting class. Schedule the class at a time when you expect work to be relatively slow, and let your director or teacher of the class know that there may be times when you have to arrive late because of work. If it's hard to commit to a long-term project, take an improvisation class or perform at an open mic night.

Express yourself artistically on weekends. The key is to make this a priority and work other activities around it. It's too easy to abandon your creativity when you're tempted by social activities or a soft, cozy bed after a long workweek.

Use vacation time to pursue an artistic outlet. While on a vacation trip, take photographs. Schedule an art trip as a vacation where you spend time painting or drawing. Take a one- or two-week class where you can immerse yourself in your art. Did you know there are even adult arts camps? Check out www.grownupcamps.com.

Take a creativity break at work when you find yourself hitting a wall. You may feel guilty, but clearing your mind will make you more productive when you get back to work. It can be refreshing to take a dance class midday and then stay later to make up the hours. If that's not possible, close the door, turn on some music, and move around for a few minutes. Listening to music at work also might help energize you or help you focus.

Be creative in your daily home life. Many people express their creative side through day-to-day activities, such as cooking, gardening, or making handmade greeting cards.

Volunteer for pro bono opportunities dealing with the arts industry.

Get published in a legal publication or start a blog.

The two important things here are choice and discipline. With 168 hours in a week, you can spend 60 hours working and 60 hours sleeping and still have 48 hours to work with. Choose to designate at least one of those hours to feed your soul, and use discipline to make it a priority.

And do it now; don't wait for the perfect time. John Grisham was working in a full-time law career when he wrote his first two novels. While you may not be seeking a full-time career in the arts, devoting time to your career and creative spirit will make you a more whole, fulfilled, and productive lawyer *and* human being.

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