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REDUCE DISTRACTIONS, INCREASE YOUR FOCUS, AND MANAGE YOUR TIME

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During intensive bar prep, your primary focus should be on passing the bar. This does not mean your entire focus has to be on studying. It means that everything you do must move you toward achieving your goal. Sleeping well, exercising regularly, and eating healthy foods prepare your body and mind to perform effectively. You need to be functioning in high gear while studying and on grueling exam days. You need to be in the best shape possible to stay focused and productive.

For two months, you will live in a bar exam "boot camp" where the test is your highest priority. You must be "on"—in mind, body, and spirit. To do this, you will need to ruthlessly protect your time and learn to manage distractions and demands that steal your study time. This chapter will help you assess where your time goes so you can cut back on and eventually get rid of whatever distracts you or does not move you forward. Charts and worksheets will help you track your time and maximize efficiency. You will develop strategies to resist what pulls you away from study and language to help you say no when offers tempt you. Letters are also provided that you can send to family and friends to help prepare them and let them know how they can help you.

Some of you are working full-time or raising families while studying. You need strategies to juggle your competing responsibilities. Many nontraditional law students are also physicians, pilots, accountants, engineers, architects, nurses, or businesspeople who cannot simply set aside the many demands they face. These “distractions” are obligations. One cannot tell a young child who needs to eat, “Not now—I'm studying,” or delay a critical medical procedure for an aging parent. You may not be able to put off a transatlantic flight, especially if you are the pilot! But you are still taking the same intensely challenging exam as are other students. You may need to employ different strategies, but much of your battle will be the same. So, to prepare for that battle, you must carve out and protect as much of your time as possible.

Each student is also unique. You learn and process information in different ways than others do. You may be “on” at different times of the day; what helps you focus may differ greatly from what works for others. To be at your best and most productive, find what works for you. Pave your own path to success.

**TIME MANAGEMENT FOR BAR APPLICANTS**

Passing the bar exam requires focus and self-discipline. Distractions must be reduced and eventually eliminated. Ease into the high-gear months by tackling time management early.
"IN READING THE LIVES OF GREAT MEN, I FOUND THAT THE FIRST VICTORY THEY WON WAS OVER THEMSELVES... SELF-DISCIPLINE WITH ALL OF THEM CAME FIRST."

— HARRY S. TRUMAN —

Some Basics of Time Management During Bar Prep

Effectively managing your time during bar prep is similar to time management generally, but the need for efficiency is greater. You don’t have a moment to waste. Intensive bar prep is like two months of finals; it is an extended time crunch. (Litigators go into “trial mode” and face similar pressures.) To fit everything you must do into the most efficient schedule, you must first know how you currently spend your time, then triage and prioritize.

The charts and tips below will help you consider how much time things take and determine the best order in which to accomplish tasks. Pay attention to whether something is better done before or after another task. For example, it may be more productive to listen to the lecture or review the outline before doing a certain practice test. You should also get into the habit of noting the time of day you are most productive so you can schedule things earlier or later accordingly.

**Align your schedule with “Bar Standard Time.”**

By the time you sit for the exam, your internal body clock should be on “Bar Standard Time.” In other words, your peak concentration periods should be from approximately 9:00 a.m. to noon and 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. There are two ways to get into that routine: either make the bar schedule your schedule from the outset, or study when you are most alert (even if that’s 2:00 a.m.) before July, and then gradually switch to bar exam timing in July.

It is important to know when you are most and least productive in order to efficiently schedule tasks. Do active work at times when you are most alert and passive work when you are less revved up. For example, you need to be “on” to do independent tasks such as taking practice tests and analyzing model answers. Doing those when you are dragging is counterproductive. But you may be able to listen to bar review lectures even when you are not quite as alert; they may help keep you awake and engaged.

**Engage in active learning.**

I think of active learning as a way of understanding information and mastering skills when you are fully engaged. Passive learning, by contrast, is a process of simply letting yourself absorb information. Generally speaking, the more you interact with material, the more you will retain. Active learning also saves time because you tend to “get” concepts more readily when you are fully engaged, reducing the time necessary to review. (Ever read the same passage several times and not understand a word? You know what I am talking about. That is a waste of time. Developing good active-reading skills helps your comprehension and retention.)

Bar preparation requires both active and passive learning. Why? You just cannot be “on,” in high gear, all day, every day for two months. You need breaks. You also need to make the most of both high-energy and low-energy cycles by balancing active and passive learning. You may be too tired to effectively continue high-energy work, but can push yourself to continue studying for another few hours if you switch to a less-active task. For instance, let’s say you have been reading a bar review outline and taking practice tests in a certain subject, and you are tired. You might take a break or call it a day and go to sleep, or you might close your eyes and just listen to either a lecture on that topic or a recording of yourself reading related rule statements. To help you calendar both active and passive learning, you need to determine what sorts of tasks require full engagement and what you can learn more easily, by simply letting information in. Start by completing the exercise below. As you read about different aspects of bar preparation in this book, think about which tasks require more energy than others.

**Active/Passive Learning Exercise**

List tasks that you need to complete, and note whether they are active or passive. If you can, try to then rank all the tasks below in descending order from most to least active, with 1 being most active.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task/Activity</th>
<th>Active/Passive</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read outlines.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study outlines.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attend/listen to bar review lectures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete practice tests and analyze answers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copy model answers to practice tests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make flash cards/charts/checklists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memorize rules using flash cards/charts/checklists.</td>
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<td>Look up rules you do not understand.</td>
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Make recordings of rule statements.
Listen to recordings of rule statements.
Prepare and eat meals.
Pay bills, do chores, and exercise.

Set up a calendaring system.
The better you are at calendaring, the smoother bar prep (and life!) will likely go. You may log bar study tasks into an online calendaring system or in a hard-copy planner, or both. You may sync your calendars so that what you need to do each day is both on your laptop and your phone or tablet. You can color-code tasks, online or on paper, perhaps highlighting in yellow what still needs to be done and in green what has already been completed. Some people also find it useful to make to-do lists each day and cross off items as they are accomplished.

Protect your time.
Reduce, and then work to eliminate, distractions in the final weeks. (More on this below.) We have an endless supply of distractions, from invasive texts, e-mails, and phone calls to internal distractions such as worry and fear. There are worthwhile distractions and those that can only be called an extraordinary waste of time.

Now your task is to become aware of where your time goes. Armed with this awareness, you will be able to manage your days and make certain you are on—the path to success. It will also help you battle the “time thieves” that steal minutes without us even noticing. One sneaky time thief is transition time. You may not be aware of how much time gets wasted when you move between tasks. Unconscious spending of time is like unconscious consumption of calories. (We fail to count the minutes between tasks just like we fail to count snacks between meals. But they add up.)

Another time thief is procrastination. When we avoid doing something, we often fill the gap with something unimportant. To battle this, keep lists of active and passive tasks. When you are too tired to do an active task such as taking a practice test, or find yourself procrastinating, do something less demanding but that nonetheless needs to be done. (Pay bills. Take walks. If it makes you feel like you are wasting less time, you can listen to recorded lectures, or your own voice reading rule statements, while you sweat off the procrastination.) Above all, keep commitments to yourself. You are important. And your future is worth every ounce of time, energy, money, and commitment you are investing right now. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. (Chapter 6 provides strategies to deal with people who do not support you and to combat the negative effects of such people.)

QUIZ

You have to study, and you have to pay bills. Does this lead you to waste time?

Do you:
1. Start the day with the bills, then start worrying about money, so you look up something on your bank statement, then realize you haven’t balanced your checkbook in a while, only to find you have wasted an hour on paying two bills that could have been paid in ten minutes?
2. Study first and pay those bills at the end of a productive day, when you are too tired to do any more reading or thinking?
3. Study for a four-hour block; then take a break to have a snack and pay the bills while eating something?

There is no right answer. You have to know yourself. Be sure you do what you need to in the order you need to do it, however, to keep your focus on study.

Keep commitments to yourself firm, but maintain flexibility within your schedule.
Think of a study commitment to yourself as you would an appointment with an expert physician you have waited months to see. You would not cancel unless there were an emergency. Don’t cancel on yourself.

Have a “Plan B” ready so you can modify your schedule if necessary. Let’s say you calendared 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. to work on practice MBEs (and, of course, to review explanatory answers). But you find it’s an off day; you are unable to focus. (You catch yourself reading the same fact pattern over and over again.) What should you do? First, try forcing yourself to focus. Get up. Stretch. And try again. If that doesn’t work, drink some water. That may wake you up. If need be, splash the water on your face. But if after these steps you still aren’t alert enough to work and learn productively, shift to another, less-active (but necessary) task and return to the practice questions later. In other words, stay committed to your schedule, but not rigidly so. Push yourself, but not if it’s counterproductive. Do remain accountable, though. If a task must be done today and you do not complete it in the morning, be sure it gets done by evening.

If you are a nontraditional student, depending on your other commitments, you may be more successful with a target goal of accomplishing certain tasks over several days, especially if you have an unpredictable work schedule. A Monday one week may
be particularly heavy, but later in the week things lighten up. You may have to finish on Thursday what you’d planned to complete at the beginning of the week. That’s fine. Again, just stay accountable. Make sure it gets done at the alternative time you designate. Be sure to read tips and suggestions below on creative ways to capture extra time, such as listening to lectures while commuting or taking practice MBEs during your lunch break.

**Track your time.**
How do you start reducing distractions and make more time for bar preparation? Begin by identifying what takes up your time. Look at each day for at least a week, preferably two. Start when you wake up and end when you go to sleep. Log what you do in fifteen-minute increments if you can, just as you would bill a client. This is an effective way to see where your time is being used productively and where it is slipping away. You cannot effectively reduce distractions when you do not know what is distracting you! You can list or chart what you do, or use the sample daily time sheet below.

**SAMPLE DAILY TIME SHEET:**
Print and daily complete the chart below for two weeks to help see where your time is going. This is a sample. You can use a day planner or law office time sheet that specifies your tasks and activities down to the tenth of an hour.
Each week, add up your time-sheet entries in the spaces below, noting how much time you spend doing exactly what. Remember that there are only 168 hours in a week!

- **Hours**
  - **Task**
    - **Work** (Be aware of how many hours you work at home or in an office, and whether that office is a place that is conducive to bar study.)
    - **Non-work-related communication**, such as with family and friends. Be sure to include phoning, texting, Skyping, instant messaging (IM), in-person visits, and the like.
    - **Extended-family commitments**, including dinners, parties, celebrations, and helping relatives with errands or tasks they depend on you for. Only log these once, so if you include these in another category below, leave this one blank.
    - **Commute to work, to school, and to bar review in summer if attending a live course.**
    - **Exercise**
    - **Religious observances**, including holidays, weddings, bar mitzvahs, christenings, Sabbath celebrations, and the like. Be sure to log time for home observance, prayer, and activities at a church, synagogue, or other religious establishment.
    - **Community, neighborhood, or other volunteer work**
    - **Child care, care of elderly or other relatives, pet care** (including walking the dog)
    - **Sleep**
    - **Meal preparation (include shopping and cooking)**
    - **Eating meals** (basic sustenance and family meals that extend beyond the time it takes to eat)
    - **Personal hygiene** (showering, hair care, dressing) and health care (your own, and what you do for young children or others who depend on you)
    - **Personal finance and record keeping** (paying the bills, sorting through mail, etc.)
    - **Personal recreation and relaxation** (TV, movies, social media, and whatever else you do to unwind)
    - **Other:**
    - **Subtotal:**
    - **Study**

**Assessment:** Does your list total more than 168 hours? Is your study time equal to 168 minus the subtotal of the time for the other items? In other words, are you actually studying for as much time as you think you are? Note that study was listed last because people tend to inflate the time spent studying. Ultimately, you will want to reorder this list, in ink, so that studying comes first. You will then work to fit everything else in, after and around your study time, in pencil. If you run out of time, try to borrow it from areas you can better afford to skimp on. For example, eat for a shorter amount of time, take shorter showers, buy healthy prepared foods instead of cooking, tell family and friends you will see them in August, arrange for child care, etc.

After charting how you spend your time, you should have a better sense of what you do that is productive and what steals or wastes your time. List your preliminary conclusions below, beginning with those activities you can eliminate, reduce the amount of time spent on, or defer until after July. Of the activities that remain, can any be completed in less time or while multitasking? Consider the following examples:

- I have to eat, but I can shave off prep time by shopping, cooking, and freezing meals for the week each Sunday evening—while listening to bar review lectures!
- I have to walk the dog, but I can use that time to get my own exercise in (and, again, listen to bar review lectures while walking or running).
- I have to pay bills, but that doesn’t require the same kind of focus that studying does, so I’ll do that later, after I have put in a good day’s work and I’m too tired to study any more.
- I have to acknowledge the birthdays of family and friends, but I will send them all an e-mail or note that says “rain check for a birthday celebration in August.”
- I have to get the most out of my practice tests, so I’ll take them first thing, when I am most focused.

**EXERCISE: Doing what you must do more efficiently**

List things you have to do, as well as creative ways to do them faster or while multitasking.

I have to ________, but I can save time by__________

I have to ________, but I can save time by__________

I have to ________, but I can save time by__________

I have to ________, but I can save time by__________
What about things to defer until after July? Some may be the following:

- Unless they help you, close your Facebook, Twitter, and other online social media accounts, or at least post “Unavailable until August” on them. Some people find support in the online community; they use posts to stay motivated. Others find social media a waste of time. Reading posts about the bar exam freaks them out. The bottom line: unless it helps keep you focused on study and accountable, take a break from social media activity until after the bar.

- Close or deactivate your IM, or set an autoreply that you are out and returning in August. (And tell people you will not reply to texts unless they are about life or death matters until after the bar.)

- Lose the chat groups. These not only waste your time, but they are insidious because they spread rampant misinformation. You don’t need “advice” from fools and naysayers. You need to study!

- Stop your own blogging, unless it helps you. (One of my former students posted a tip for every MBE question she got wrong and found that it both reinforced her own learning and helped others. The entries became online flash cards.)

- Record a message on your voice mail saying you are gone until the end of July.

- Put an out of office message on your e-mail, and tell close friends and family that unless they put the word URGENT in the subject line, you won’t read their messages until after July. (Note: if you must stay connected, check e-mail at the end of the day, after you are done studying.)

What can I spend less time on, eliminate, or defer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Defer until after the bar, or spend less time on in June and July</th>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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</table>

One of the greatest interrupters is other people trying to reach you. Do not interrupt yourself or your study flow for phone calls, texts, IMs, or e-mail. This is critical. It is so easy to say, “It’s just one call,” or “It’s just one message,” or “I would have needed a break anyway sooner or later.” Even with a short call, what will break is your concentration.

Will you be answering calls during the exam? No! So don’t interrupt yourself now.

If you must look at texts and e-mails (for work, for example), create “communication office hours.” At those times only, once or twice a day, check your messages. Set these hours at a time when you are less efficient, during your least productive time. Whatever e-mail, texts, or other correspondence you do not get to during today’s office hours, handle tomorrow. Do not cut into your study, sleep, or exercise time. Be vigilant. Protect your time. Focus on the big goal—passing the bar. Nearly everything else can wait.

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**IT CAN WAIT**

It can wait. In a movie-theater preview/public-service announcement requesting quiet during the film, the famous actor Billy Crystal asks that the audience silence their cell phones. The theater darkens, the audience munches popcorn, then everyone turns and stares when Billy Crystal’s phone rings. He doesn’t realize it is his phone and complains that the phone’s owner should turn it off. When he sees the ringing is actually his own phone, he sheepishly sinks into his chair and panics. Should he answer or not? What if it’s his doctor telling him he only has a short while to live? He succumbs to temptation and listens to the message. His dry cleaning is ready. The theater screen flashes, “It can wait!”—and his face tells all. When you are studying and your phone rings, tell yourself, “It can wait!”

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**Combat e-distractions.**

Reducing e-distractions is particularly difficult because most of you study online, at least to some extent. Your bar review may be online, but even if it is in person there will likely be a website and online materials you need to review. Thus, the very same tool you learn from also lures you away from studying. Because of that, it may be even more tempting to just check the gossip while you are online. Unless you have positive peer pressure or support online, most social media will not move you toward bar success. They are at best a distraction; more often they are blatantly destructive. (You freak out when hot-air blowhards say they have been studying sixteen hours a day, implying that you’re a loser if you are not. Other people share their anxiety. But
you likely already have enough of your own! You don't need to hear about everyone else's.) Social media are also a haven for misinformation. If you must surf the net (if it's become an addiction that you cannot break), visit reliable sites that you know are helpful. For example, go to the websites of your state bar, the National Conference of Bar Examiners, your bar review, and sites recommended by your ASP faculty. Print a sheet of trustworthy websites and keep it near your computer.

**EXERCISE: Reliable websites I want readily accessible during bar prep:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. National Conference of Bar Examiners</td>
<td>ncbex.org</td>
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</table>

List five e-distractions. Next to each, think of ways to manage or eliminate the distraction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-distractions</th>
<th>Manage or Eliminate By:</th>
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**Time-Management Tips for Law Students Who Are Parents**

Many nontraditional students say they feel guilty that law school is taking them away from their kids. If your children are in elementary school, middle school, or high school, realize that your studying is positive role modeling. You are teaching them discipline and the value of hard work through your actions. (This is much more effective than preaching!) Don't be surprised if your children do better in school when you are also studying. The following are a few practical pointers:

- Keep "office hours" so your family knows when you are studying and not to be interrupted, and when you are available. Even if family time is an hour at dinner every night, keep your commitment. It is even more important when you are gone a lot to be consistent and reliable. If they know when they can depend on you to give them your full attention at one certain time each day, they may be better able to leave you alone the rest of the day.
- Be sure to include your family (children, significant other, parents) in your studying when you can productively do so. When you take breaks, ask them to test you with flash cards. (Just be prepared, your kids may memorize the rules before you do!)
- Play audio versions of your bar review lectures while you are driving, cooking, cleaning, or playing with your kids.
- Bring flash cards (or, better still, have them on your smartphone) to test yourself if you are at the park or waiting in line at the market.
- If you have young children, read your bar review outlines aloud. Infants and toddlers mostly just want to hear your voice and be close to you. Whether you are reading Dr. Seuss, Shakespeare, or Farnsworth on Contracts may not matter!
- Plan a fun after-bar trip or activity and let your kids (if age appropriate) decide what that will be.23 (I work with many students who take the bar in southern California and bring their families to Disneyland for a few days after the exam.)

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**MOVE OUT. THIS SOUNDS EXTREME, BUT SOME PEOPLE NEED TO LEAVE HOME TO FIND QUIET.**

A student recently told me of his significant involvement with a nonprofit organization involved in animal rescues. The work requires him to frequently and with no notice drop everything to help in emergencies with homeless and abused animals. This same student also noted that family and friends often stop by his home. He decided to move out for June and July so that he could have total focus, without interruptions. Another graduate who recently passed the bar told me that with his family's permission he moved out for six weeks prior to the exam, and lived in a summer dorm on a college campus nearby where he was going to take the bar exam. (Some colleges have inexpensive summer housing.) Yet another student whose home was too noisy to concentrate visited all the local libraries and coffee shops in April and May until he found a comfortable place to study.
MULTITASKING, BUILDING ENDURANCE, AND INCREASING FOCUS

Once you know where your time is going, you can use your time and energy to train to perform more effectively. The following charts and exercises will help you see how you are spending your time and better manage it. First, some thoughts on multitasking.

I may not win friends by suggesting that a good place to start looking at critically is how and when you multitask. But to build the physical and mental endurance to focus for long, uninterrupted blocks on the bar exam, you must train. Some multitasking is great. I call it "capturing time." You may be able to effectively listen to law lectures while you drive or commute by public transportation, exercise, or cook. But multitasking has its downsides. We are so used to it that we tend not to give intense focus to anything. We check e-mail and texts at the dinner table, while paying bills, even in the bathroom! How many of you regularly use your phone or laptop for personal matters during class while your professor is talking? (If you do, I can guarantee you are not getting the most of what that person has to offer, and are likely missing key points.)

Most people try to do so much at once that they don't give themselves an opportunity to ever be truly focused. Given the hectic lives of many law students, it may feel like a break to just focus on the bar exam. It can be a relief to say no to everything else for a few months, to put aside all the stuff you don't want to do or deal with and give your total concentration to something you really desire.

Give a try. When you are studying, focus only on studying. If you are taking a practice test and catch yourself pulling out your phone, looking out the window, or contemplating the holes in your jeans, force yourself back into the question, back into the moment. Reread the facts, aloud if you need to.

I challenge you to see how long you can go with this single-minded focus. Try to build up to working productively in four-hour blocks. If you can be "on" for four-hour stretches, three-hour testing blocks (common on bar exams) will seem very doable. (If you are used to lifting ten-pound weights, five-pounders feel easy.)

CAPTURING TIME.

Again, some multitasking is productive. Use commute time in cars, trains, or buses; listen to podcasts or make tapes of yourself reading rules from your outlines. Listen while you exercise. (One of my students managed to purchase a waterproof listening device so she could study while swimming!) Use screen family and friend time, when people are willing to test you, on flash cards. (Younger kids love to quiz their parents!) Use mealtime; form study groups with classmates and talk about and debrief practice questions over lunch or dinner.

"DO A LITTLE MORE EACH DAY THAN YOU THINK YOU POSSIBLY CAN."

— LOWELL THOMAS —

BE SELECTIVE IN THE WORK YOU DO. USE BETTER, NOT JUST MORE, MATERIALS.

Don't buy every supplemental resource you see. Too much information will distract you and waste your time. Worse still, some of that material may not be from reliable sources. When you review law that is wrong, it is not only a waste (a neutral, if you will), but it will undo progress you have made (a severe negative—a time thief.) If you get caught up in contradictory sources, you may find yourself more confused than ever and having to start over. No time for that! Enroll in a reputable bar review and trust their materials. Remember, too, that rule statements are often phrased differently while still conveying the same elements, standard, factors, and the like. Do not be nitpicky about phrasing. Learn the underlying concepts. (Chapter 5 explains the need for, and how to ensure that you get, quality help from qualified experts.)

Strive for consistency.

Whatever time you give each day to study, keep your schedule consistent. Keep the commitment to spend a focused amount of time each day on preparing for the bar exam, preferably in uninterrupted blocks that mirror the length of time you will have to perform on your bar exam. And continue asking what you can give up to make more study time. Remember, the sacrifice is temporary!

Bar prep really is a full-time endeavor, even if you are working while studying. A student e-mailed me two weeks into bar review, saying how shocked she was that the study schedule mapped out activities for seven days a week. She thought it would be a five-days-a-week schedule, with time to "catch up on the weekends." No. (Bar reviews
usually include lectures and other lessons for at least six days each week and often they include or you will have to include on your own homework on the 7th day.) This is yet another reason I urge you to plan early, get your schedule in place, and work out your time-management issues. I don't care how smart you are—if you don't put in the time, you will regret it.

**Stay Healthy: Reduce Stress, Eat Right, Exercise, and Sleep**

These are all interconnected; the more you eat right, exercise, and sleep, the less stressed you will be.

You need to sleep. You need to be focused and doing your absolute best when you're studying and taking the exam. You cannot perform well if you don't sleep each night and replenish your energy.

You need to exercise. The more fit you are, the better you will be able to concentrate. Physical activity also helps to both relieve stress and improve sleep. Incorporate some exercise in your daily routine, such as walking, swimming, running, or yoga. Pick something easy that you can do without much preparation, equipment, or fanfare. If you feel guilty spending time on exercise, study while you move. Listen to bar review lectures while you walk or run, or read outlines while on the treadmill or stationary bike. (This is one time when multitasking can be your best friend.)

It's normal to be tired. People often underestimate the physical demands of intellectual work. If you are studying with sufficient intensity, you should be exhausted. And bar studies take even more energy because of the stress. Be sure to pace yourself so you peak at exam time and not weeks earlier.

You may feel like people do not get how much work this is and how much pressure you face. They don't. Don't expect them to understand unless they themselves are lawyers. People may begrudge your taking time out for exercise and sleep and not for them. But let me tell you, you need sleep and exercise in order to study well. (Blame your summer disappearance on me. See the letters in Chapter 6 that you can send to family and friends explaining why you are "gone.")

Another reason for fatigue is sleeping difficulties. Anxiety may rob you of a good night's sleep. You may then become even more anxious because you are sleepy and less productive than you would be if you had slept well. Many bar applicants find it hard to fall asleep because they are so wound up. Others wake frequently in the middle of the night with nightmares about fact patterns. Nontraditional students who must juggle work and family on top of studying may have an even harder time getting enough sleep. But sleep you must! Figure out ways to combat insomnia—before the exam. Some students find it helpful to read a novel before bed; reading about another world takes them far enough away from the law to relax. Others find that TV, a hot bath, or a glass of wine does the trick. Learn what works to get you to fall asleep and stay asleep. (One former student shared that the only way to take his mind off law and fall asleep each night was to read histories of naval battles. He would think about how and where to move the ships and other military strategy issues and would relax enough to forget about his bar studies. Crazy but true!)

**"THE HEIGHTS BY GREAT MEN REACHED AND KEPT WERE NOT OBTAINED BY SUDDEN FLIGHT, BUT THEY, WHILE THEIR COMPANIONS SLEPT WERE TOILING UPWARD IN THE NIGHT."**

— HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW —

Keep the Wadsworth quote in mind if you find you cannot sleep on certain nights. You are toiling. And your hard work will pay off.
TOP TEN TIPS THAT WILL HELP EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

1. "Believe you can PASS!"
If law is a second or third career or you came to law school later in life, dispel any doubts that as an older person, you can’t pass. Baloney! Some things may be more challenging. It may be a challenge to sit for long periods of time and your fingers may cramp from writing or typing for hours. You can work through these.

You set your goal in Chapter 1. Sticking with that goal sometimes poses particular challenges for nontraditional students. You are tempted to slip into thinking, “Well, I’ll give it a shot, but I doubt I can pull it off with all the work and family commitments I am juggling.”

Cut that out. Such built-in excuses are a setup for failure. You decided to pass, so continue working toward that end with every ounce of energy you can muster. Stop and slap yourself if you find you are saying things like, “I’d like to pass, and I will eventually, but I do have a job that pays the bills for now so it won’t be too big a deal if I don’t pass this first time. I can always take it again.” No, No, No. Passing is that big a deal—for you, for your classmates, for your law school.

I remind my students all the time that they are a class; they rise and fall together. If everyone in your class passes the bar exam, you and all of your colleagues will realize positive ripple effects. Do not sell yourself short, and do not let your classmates down. Put as plainly as possible, you are all responsible for the prestige (or lack thereof) of your diplomas. If you don’t need the license to find a job to feed yourself or your family, you may not be as “hungry” as some of those you are competing against. Your wanting to pass thus has to be as powerful as classmates who need to. Find the motivation. The high of passing, the stamp of credibility you gain, and the doors that will open all make the effort worth it. And, on the flipside, the cost of failure is far higher than you might imagine. Read Part II of this book if you think, “I can always take it again.” (To paraphrase Apollo 13, “Failure is not an option.”)

2. Secure “buy-in” from family and significant others.
Help those in your support system to understand what you need while studying. And plan something fun to celebrate and thank them when the exam is done. (Chapter 6 includes advice on how to gain family and community support, and how to handle a lack of support.)

3. Start early: Two months is not enough!
When you cannot study as many hours in the day as other students can, you must start earlier. Eight weeks might be sufficient for full-time bar students who average sixty hours per week of studying. But if you are working a demanding job or have extensive family commitments, plan to study throughout your entire last year in law school. Some bar reviews have early-start programs, or you can create your own pre-bar-review schedule. You will want to slowly and steadily review all the subjects tested on the exam and begin incorporating regular practice exams into your week.

4. Carve out several productive hours each day.
Determine when you study most productively, and dedicate those hours exclusively to bar prep. Post your study schedule so that anyone who wants your time knows when you may not be interrupted. Unless it’s a true emergency, keep study time for studying. You cannot afford to waste time. (Staring into space or “glazing over” while forcing study into an unproductive time of day is just as much wasted time as taking the afternoon off and going to the beach. Many working students feel guilty about not doing as much during the week, so they study for sixteen-hour days on weekends. But most people cannot sustain high-level productivity for more than eight to ten hours a day. (Even two or three quality hours would be more beneficial than ten hours of spinning your wheels.)

5. Stay organized, disciplined, and committed to success.
Get systems in place to handle whatever must be done while you are studying. Put off everything that can wait until August. Know where everything is. (You can’t afford to spend time looking for your keys when you are heading out the door to bar review!) If there are occasions you must acknowledge in June and July (birthdays or anniversaries), buy cards and gifts (and wrap them) ahead of time and have them ready to go. Or give IOUs and celebrate in August. (More in Chapter 6 on saying no to important occasions that arise in June and July.)

6. Don’t skimp on sleep, exercise, or motivating study breaks.
The bar exam is both a physical and mental challenge. It is especially critical to be in shape and feel well, and to every extent possible be ready to perform at your best. (You will need some fun and relaxation to recharge your batteries.)

7. Protect your time. Protect your work space.
Your study hours are precious. Do you hand over the keys to your home without very good reason to do so? Don’t hand away your key to success: your time!
Another thing many people find boosts their concentration and productivity is a clear work space. If you have an office or desk that is all yours, keep it that way. And do not share your computer with anyone during bar prep. Keep your spyware and antivirus protections up to date. The last thing you need is a virus on your computer in the weeks before the bar exam.

8. Reduce, and work to eliminate, distractions.
See above. Don’t get sucked into anything unless it helps you study, sleep, or recharge your batteries. This is not the time to buy or sell a house, figure out relationship issues, or go on a diet. In fact, it is not a productive time to worry about anything. If you need to, have a good worry in May about whatever is going on; then put your non-bar cares in a box that you will not open until August.

If you find that you are continually worrying, about the bar and everything else, try designating one hour per week as “worry hour.” At the appointed time, you can rant, cry, scream, complain, or write a nasty letter (that you will never send) listing everything that is bugging you, bar related or otherwise. When your worry hour is over, put your concerns away for the week and get back to work.

You should also allow absolutely no stressing over how much material there is to learn. When you find yourself worrying about that, get to work. Take a practice test. Review lecture notes. Memorize rule statements with flash cards. Working will get you much further than worrying.

9. Set realistic expectations.
Do not rush yourself through outlines, lectures, or practice tests. It is better to learn what you’re spending time on than to hastily go through the material and not really absorb it. Revise your plans if your time estimates are not working. And, when you are too tired to focus, switch tasks or sleep if you need to.

10. Use every minute effectively.
Study when you study. (For example, don’t fall into the trap of feeling guilty that you are not studying when you are with family, and feeling guilty that you are not with family when you are studying.) All that gets you is a lot of guilt and not a lot of effective studying. Be in the moment. Use commute time and exercise time to listen to bar review lectures or recordings of your own voice reading rule statements.