

# Ask Abet!

**Dear Abet:**

*Help! I am overwhelmed with my volume of work. How can I manage my workload more effectively?*

*Sincerely, Drowning*

**Dear Drowning,**

There are several things that in-house lawyers can do to help streamline the work flow. However, the idea of streamlining workloads can be lost as we do not have the *time* to actually implement *time-savers*. So the short answer to your question is the “The smallest act of efficiency is worth more than the grandest intention.” [Apologies to Oscar Wilde for the misquote.]

Some longer answers to your question are as follows:

- **Issue:** *Do you find yourself repeatedly answering the same question?*

**Action:** If you find that you have to constantly repeat yourself to different departments, people or anyone other than your children, then one sure-fire way to eliminate the repetition and ensure consistency in responding is to set up your frequently provided responses as a “signature” in your Outlook. In the future, when that same question rears its ugly head, you simply have to click “Reply”, “Signature” select the proper answer and “Send”.

**Benefit:** This ensures timely responses that are always consistent.

- [To set up a signature: Open a new email in Outlook. Click on the “Signature” icon. Select “Signatures”. Click “New”. Type a Name for the new signature (e.g. “Standard Indemnity”, “Diversity Statement”, “Lunch Order”, etc.). Populate the text that is commonly repeated in the text box provided. Save.]

- **Issue:** *Do you find yourself being asked questions of which you do not know the answer?*

**Action:** No one wants to look stupid, especially lawyers, so we often take on the burden of bird-dogging internal corporate questions that may not be squarely suited in the Legal realm. The requestor may sit in limbo while the lawyer forwards the question to a third party and waits for a reply only to send the response back to the original requestor. Cut out the middle man. Reply to the requestor and copy the person who would know the answer. Clarify that you are copying the person who can best answer the question to help facilitate resolution.

**Benefit:** You will be perceived as an excellent resource and can lose the bottle-neck stigma that often follows the corporate lawyers. An added benefit is that if there is a delay in obtaining the response, the pressure will be shifted rightfully to the shoulders of the person with the actual knowledge.

- **Issue:** *Do you find yourself attending futile meetings? Have you ever had to tell someone that you weren’t able to get any work done because you were in meetings?*

**Action:** Change your approach to meetings. If you are invited to meet, send a notice to the meeting's requestor which states something along the lines of "I have received your meeting notice. Please update the meeting request to include 1) a statement of precisely what you require from me (i.e. – the issue) and 2) all documents that will be necessary for the meeting." [Ideally, you would have set this message up as a "Signature", buying you even more time!]

**Benefit:** By having the requestor state the issue up front, you force the requestor to put some thought into why the lawyer needs to attend and you minimize the superfluous discussions that may prolong an otherwise simple discussion. (This will not work for all meetings but it should have a meaningful impact.) You will be able to ascertain, early on, whether additional parties or documents would be required. You empower yourself to resolve the issue right away versus requiring additional meetings. You will actually be able to get work done.

- **Issue:** *Do you have a high quantity of small matters that require attention?* Sometimes we can have so many mosquitos swarming about that we can't swat them all.

**Action:** Categorize your mosquitos and strike one, large blow. Perhaps you have numerous contracts from various areas of your business that require review. Sort your contracts by area (e.g. Sourcing, Consignment, Sales, Human Resources, etc.). Schedule a meeting for yourself *on one category only*.

**Benefit:** By reviewing contracts of the same category, you develop an economy of scale and can improve your own turnaround time. If you set up this self-meeting to reoccur weekly, then the business can have predictable expectations as to your deliverables!

Granted, there will always be fire-drills and complex matters that will pull you under but, hopefully, these tips can help you come up for air!

**Regards,  
Abet**