

EVERYTHING HAS A PROCESS PART 2 HOW TO IMPROVE YOURS

Once you have identified a process in your firm, you can take steps to improve that process. Remember, your processes may vary based on each matter's circumstances, but a process exists for everything you do. The hard part is figuring out whether your work is efficient and making improvements to help your firm boost that efficiency.

Take, for example, scheduling hearings. In some jurisdictions, you must coordinate hearings with opposing counsel and witnesses, and account for the court's availability. If your staff contacts opposing counsel to select a date before checking the court's calendar, the effort to coordinate may have been in vain. Most would check the court's calendar before trying to coordinate, keeping in mind that if it takes too long to agree with the other side, you might have to re-check the court calendar multiple times. Scheduling hearings is usually quite simple. But this example reveals there are easy and hard ways, even with simple processes.

Process improvement may include minor changes to the steps taken in the procedure. Other improvements may require a complete re-engineering, which might involve upending the current method. The goal is to do more with less. Consider modifications in light of the fact that the people doing the work, the work being done, and the technology used may be affected.

These tips help you evaluate potential process improvements effectively:

LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

The view from 10,000 feet sometimes reveals issues right off the bat.

EVALUATE ISSUES IN SMALLER PIECES

Once you have identified an issue, mapping out the process, including every step taken, by whom, when, and what else that step affects, can reveal simple potential solutions.

LOOK AT THE ISSUES FROM EVERY ANGLE

Don't limit yourself to looking at the steps taken and how you can change them. Consider whether you have the right people handling each action, are fully exploiting your technology to be efficient, and whether automation could make the functions easier.

USE AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY

Don't fear automation technologies. Automation wins big if the price fits your budget and the prospective tool reduces delays and complications.

BE OPEN TO CHANGE

Improvement requires change. Without change, things stay the same, and nothing gets better.

Finally, remember that change isn't easy – there will be bumps in the road. Making changes may cause different problems to crop up or reveal issues no one even knew existed. People may rebel, and you may lose people who can't or don't want to keep up with the changes. But, if the changes you make are for the greater good, you will find your firm and its processes stronger in the end.