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Time, Task and Trust: How a Personal Assistant Can Improve a Managing Partner's Productivity

1. Introduction

In a busy Nigerian law firm, the Managing Partner (MP) is expected to combine legal judgement, client development, firm strategy and people leadership - all while keeping a calendar that never seems to shrink. Personal Assistants (PAs) who sit beside those leaders are uniquely placed to convert daily chaos into focused, high-value productivity. When a PA intentionally masters these three pillars - Time, Task and Trust - they don't just help the MP get through the day: they multiply the MP's capacity to work and lead.

Below, is a delineation of the concrete ways PAs can deliver that multiplier effect, with practical steps and supporting evidence.

2. Time: Reclaiming the Managing Partner's Calendar

An MP's most scarce resource is attention. PAs increase a leader's attention-on-impact by controlling the calendar, protecting focus blocks and triaging interruptions.

What to do:

2.1 **Master calendar triage:** Treat the MP's calendar as a strategic instrument, not a diary. Evaluate meeting requests against strategic priorities (billable work, partner development, client renewals and firm business strategy) before bookings are made.

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This reduces low-value meetings and creates space for thinking on what matters most.[2]

2.2 **Use timeboxing and focus blocks:** Reserve recurring blocks for deep work (strategy, complex files/cases) and protect them. Timeboxing is a proven productivity technique; and PAs can enforce it by offering alternative calendar slots and by pre-briefing meeting attendees to make sessions with the MP concise and time-efficient.[3]

2.3 **Standardize meeting preparation:** Circulate short meeting pre-reads, clear agendas and expected outcomes 24-48 hours ahead. Meetings without pre-reads cost time and PAs who insist on brief agendas can cut meeting length and improve decisions.

2.4 **Be the gatekeeper, not the gate-closer:** A smart PA filters genuine urgent interruptions from things that can wait or be delegated. Triage rules - e.g., "green = delegate, amber = escalate, red = immediate" - make decisions predictable and fast.

Why it matters:

2.5 Reducing small, unnecessary interruptions frees the MP for high-value tasks such as client strategy or partner coaching. Industry and practitioner guidance indicate that structured executive support measurably enhances leadership effectiveness and delivers significant return on investment (ROI) in engaging a PA or Executive Assistant.[4]

3. Task: Streamlining Workflows and Delegation

PAs can dramatically increase firm throughput by owning and improving task flows that sit between lawyers, clients and outside providers.

What to do:

3.1 **Design repeatable templates and playbooks:** Common processes like- engagement letters, conflict checks, travel logistics, filing and court process routines, should have playbooks a PA can run end-to-end. This reduces bespoke administration for every

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2 Christianah Idowu (2025) "Calendar triage: The hidden skill every Assistant needs" available at <https://www.linkedin.com/posts/christianah-idowu-ba5232194_calendar-triage-the-hidden-skill-every-assistant-activity-7366540724709769217-7dR6/> accessed on 1st September, 2025.

3 Marc Zao-Sanders (2018) "How Timeboxing Works and Why It Will Make You More Productive" available at <https://hbr.org/2018/12/how-timeboxing-works-and-why-it-will-make-you-more-productive?tpcc=orgsocial_edit&utm_campaign=hbr&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkedin> accessed on 6th August, 2025.

4 Bold Assistants (2025) "The ROI of Hiring an Executive Assistant for CEOs and Founders" available at <https://boldassistants.com/the-roi-of-hiring-an-executive-assistant-for-ceos-and-founders/> accessed on 15th September, 2025.

request and lowers error risk. Legal knowledge management research highlights the value of codified repeatable processes in firms.[5]

3.2 **Operate as the MP's workflow integrator:** Track tasks assigned to the MP and to partners, maintain a single master action list and push status updates. PAs who synthesize and escalate only the exceptions save the MP time previously spent chasing updates.[6]

3.3 **Delegate intelligently and coach teams:** Delegation is not abdication. Train junior staff and paralegals to take on discrete, lower-risk tasks (document assembly, basic client follow-ups, filing). Delegation increases organizational capacity and improves staff satisfaction when done with clear instruction and feedback.

3.4 **Leverage technology deliberately:** Adopt firm-approved tools - shared calendars (e.g., Google Calendar, Microsoft Outlook Calendar, Teamup Calendar etc.), task managers (e.g., Zoho Workplace - PlanetWeb, Otawise, Lawmatics, Clio Grow etc.), a secure document repository and client intake workflows (e.g., Microsoft Office 365 SharePoint, Google Shared Drive, Clio Grow, Clustdoc, Practice Panther etc.). The PA often serves as the change agent for adoption, configuring tools to fit legal workflows and ensuring usage policies are followed.

Why it matters:

3.5 Well-run task systems reduce friction, lower rework and free the MP from routine operational management so the MP can focus on strategy, client relationships and mentoring - the activities that grow the firm.

4. Trust: Confidentiality, Discretion and Authority

In law firms, trust is not optional. PAs handle privileged information, client lists and strategic plans and their professional conduct directly affects the firm's ethical obligations and client confidence.

What to do:

4.1 **Be rigorous about confidentiality:** PAs must understand the ethical rules around client confidentiality and attorney-client privilege. In many jurisdictions, and particularly

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5 Stefane M. Kabene et al (2006) "Knowledge Management in Law Firms" available at <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/jilt/2006_1/kabene/kabene.pdf> accessed on 6th August, 2025.

6 C-Suite Assistants (2024) "From Chaos to Clarity: Transforming Executive Workflows with Personal Assistant Expertise" available at <https://csuiteassistants.com/blog/transforming-executive-workflows-with-personal-assistant-expertise/?utm_source=chatgpt.com> accessed on 7th August, 2025.

under ethical guidance like the *Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners in Nigeria*, disclosure of client information is tightly restricted.[7] PAs should follow firm policies on who can access files, how information is transmitted and how external requests are handled.

4.2 **Establish secure communication protocols:** Use approved encrypted channels for client or case-sensitive messages. Avoid ad-hoc personal apps for transmitting privileged documents. Ensure all devices are secured (passwords, multi-factor authentication) and that cloud tools comply with the firm's data policy. Recent industry practice and legal provision like the *Nigeria Data Protection Act*, 2023 emphasizes data strategy and security as central to modern legal practice.[8]

4.3 **Document decisions and authority lines:** When PAs make scheduling or administrative decisions on behalf of the MP, they should maintain quick written records (emails or brief notes) so roles and approvals are auditable. This reduces confusion and supports compliance.

4.4 **Exercise disciplined discretion in media and public communications:** If the firm or MP is media-facing, PAs should coordinate with communications counsel before releasing statements. The legal profession's ethical rules can intersect with public commentary as informal comments could jeopardize client confidentiality or occasion professional impropriety.

Why it matters:

4.5 Trust allows the MP to delegate more. When partners, clients and regulators know the PA is sober, secure and ethical, they accept the PA's authority and the MP can lean on them for more high-value delegation.

5. Practical Toolkit a PA should maintain: Templates, Metrics and Habits

A PA who wants to be seen as an indispensable strategic partner should assemble a compact toolkit - some of which includes:

a. **A one-page daily brief for the MP** containing top 3 priorities, meetings of the day with projected/expected outcomes, a single sentence on urgent/high priority tasks.

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7 Rule 19, Part II of the *Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners*, 2023, Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette No. 103, Vol. 110, Lagos - 6th June 2023.

8 Section 39, Part VII, *Nigeria Data Protection Act*, 2023 available at <https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Nigeria-Data-Protection-Act-2023.pdf> accessed on 7th August, 2025.

b. **A meeting-brief template** containing meeting objective, attendees, desired decision and pre-reads.

c. **A delegation matrix** that maps delegated tasks to owners with deadlines and status tags.

d. **Security checklist** for communications and device use (e.g., email encryption, document access, approved apps).

e. **Quarterly productivity review** with simple metrics: percentage of time protected as focus time; number of meetings shorter than 30 minutes; number of delegated items closed without MP intervention.

Why measure: Metrics create a feedback loop. For example, small wins - reducing meeting hours by 10% month-on-month or increasing protected focus time - are persuasive evidence to partners that PA systems work.

6. Bringing It Together: Practical Scenarios

6.1 **Client crisis management (time + task + trust):** A client calls late for an urgent regulatory compliance filing. The PA activates the crisis playbook: notifies the MP, assembles the required documents, books a focused conference for relevant counsel, follows up with counsel assigned to draft necessary documents, undertake filings, and ensures secure transmission of documents. The MP's intervention is reserved for legal judgment; everything else runs smoothly because the PA had systems and trust to act in a timeous manner.

6.2 **Strategic off-site (time + trust):** When the firm schedules a strategy retreat, the PA blocks the MP's calendar weeks in advance, circulates materials, manages RSVPs and logistics and ensures that confidentiality protocols for sensitive discussion materials are enforced. The MP can therefore invest energy in content and relationships rather than administrative matters.

7. Actionable Next Steps to improve a Managing Partner's Productivity

a. Create a 1-page daily brief template and deliver it each morning to the MP.

b. Build three playbooks: urgent client matters, new client intake and travel/expenses journal.

c. Introduce weekly "no meeting" focus blocks on the MP's calendar.

d. Audit security and confidentiality practices with the firm's compliance lead.

e. Track at least two productivity metrics (protected focus time; percentage of meetings with pre-reads) and report quarterly.

8. Conclusion

PAs who combine disciplined time management, robust task systems and unquestioned trust become multipliers for Managing Partners. In Nigeria's dynamic legal market, the PA who professionalizes these functions, by codifying playbooks, enforcing confidentiality and leveraging technology carefully and innovatively, positions the MP to work and lead with clarity.

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