

# How Did They Do It?

## TIME MANAGEMENT, PLANNING, AND TECHNOLOGY: TOOLS OF THE BUSY AALL PRESIDENT

by E.H. Uwe Beltz

Productivity and success engender additional opportunities. After all, if you want something done, ask a busy person. While of course there is some logical limit to this seeming paradox, current and past AALL presidents are a testament to this tenet of professionalism. And for me, as I wrote this article, it was proven true.

When I first saw the call for the opportunity to write this article, I thought I could be an ideal person for the job. I say this not because of my time management skills (which are continuously developing) or interest in the effective or efficient use of technology, but because while I was starting in the profession at the University of North Carolina (go Heels!) I had the opportunity to observe both an AALL president serve during her term—Carol Avery Nicholson (2002-2003)—and the continuing skills of a legend—Lolly Gasaway (1986-1987)—who was both my professor for two law classes and my boss.

The present article was motivated by seeing and learning from these two awesome leaders. While both leading hectic, multi-faceted careers, they still found time to motivate and mentor staff and colleagues. Whether leading by example or sharing insights, lessons, and strategies, these leaders manage to allot time for the important task of supporting and encouraging staff and colleagues. No doubt, many others who read this have similar stories they could tell of other leaders (AALL past presidents or otherwise) they have observed firsthand.

Even while I was awaiting a response on whether I would be chosen to write the article, yet another incident happened that convinced me that I was

the person destined to have this opportunity. While gathering information for developing a faculty tenure status document at my present position at Texas Tech University School of Law, I sent out a request via the law-lib online discussion list for information on the “AALL Professional Competencies report,” which I had seen while working at UNC and knew would help with my current research needs. I received about 12 replies (other than the approximately 75 out of office replies—where were you all?). While most offered useful suggestions, only one had the correct answer—and what was most remarkable was that it was from immediate AALL Past President Ann Fessenden (2007-2008).

After observing Nicholson’s

extremely busy presidential year and the other activities during her immediate past president year, I knew how busy Fessenden must have been. Yet she voluntarily took the time to respond to a non-paid request for information online.

All of this reaffirmed in me the realization of the level of service that people in our profession are driven to provide and the fact that even someone with as many things to do as Ann Fessenden would take the initiative to respond with just the piece of information I needed.

### Survey Details

In order to support writing this article, I created a survey in Zoomerang. I sent the survey to 30 past presidents—from our most recent (Ann Fessenden) to the earliest serving and surviving AALL past president, Morris Cohen. The format asked 14 questions, with an even mix of

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— Ann Fessenden, AALL President 2007-2008



qualitative and quantitative questions. Most of the quantitative questions provided an opportunity for additional “qualitative” or anecdotal observations and comments. After one e-mail request for information, 50 percent of the sample (15 past presidents) responded in two working days. Remarkably, the final response rate was 75 percent of the sampled group.

This article has a focus on time management—both how did the AALL presidents succeed and how did technology facilitate their successes. From the survey greeting, the following introduction was given:

*The hoped-for purpose is to use some of the results to write an article for AALL Spectrum on leadership and particularly time management skills of people who have been elected to the position of president of the American Association of Law Libraries. The hypothesis is that people who have ascended to this position probably have well-developed time management skills, and those skills were likely developed by some technique prior to reaching that position. I will also look to relate anecdotal observations about the impacts of technology on time management techniques and workload.*

The past presidents provided many gems of information—some humorous, some factual, and some an equal mix of both. All comments were informative and generated much thought. Unfortunately, I can’t share all of the comments, so what is presented is my literary license-based anecdotal analysis of the comments.

I attempt to attribute as many quotable comments as possible, including as many individual responses as possible. Often there were multiple similar responses, though only one was chosen as representative. Where the numbers were significant on a specific point, a report of the quantities whether reported in numbers or percentages is given.



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— Janis Johnston, AALL President 2003-2004

## Mixed Reviews on Technology

I observed that even though many feel there is a benefit of technology, there is also a double-edged sword effect of technology. A series of questions focused on what tools the past presidents used for time management before, during, and after they were in the position. All but the latest three past presidents agreed that there is new technology now available that was not available to them while they served.

### **“I use deadlines (self-imposed or otherwise) and to-do lists to manage procrastination.”**

— Carol Avery  
Nicholson, AALL  
President 2002-2003



When responding to the question of whether they would have been able to accomplish more with the new technology, some harkened back to a simpler time. Roger Jacobs (1981-1982) says that “the new tools are responses to a faster moving, more complicated society.”

Jacquelyn Jurkins (1984-1985) points out that there was a much smaller Headquarters staff in the past. “[If] e-mail had been generally available, that communication and dialogue would have been much easier,” she says.

But Penny Hazelton (1990-1991) believes that e-mail allows contact regardless of “whether you are the right person or not,” illustrating the double-edged effect of technology.

No one respondent better acknowledged the dichotomy of technology’s effect than Mark Estes (1992-1993), who says that he wasn’t sure if technology would have made him more effective, since “[t]he PDA and applications digitize the Day-Timer, but I don’t think they save time.” Estes adds, that “[i]f the iPhone I am getting in the next couple weeks lives up to its hype, I would have been able to do more.”

Tory Trotta (2004-2005) says, “Whoever invented the PDA should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.”

## Paper v. Electronic

Speaking of high hopes, think of the hope for a paperless society. I know it is common to joke these days about how technology has only increased the volume of paper we use. In the results of

the survey, I found further evidence of this reality. I asked about a whole range of time management tools used before, during, and after the experience of being an AALL president, including paper to-do lists, paper calendars, Day-Timer-type planners, Outlook calendars and to-do lists, laptops, and the increasingly ubiquitous personal digital assistant (PDA).

Eighty percent of all respondents still use paper to-do lists (I speculate those are significantly ingrained, easy-to-use tools). Despite the phenomenal growth in the use of Outlook calendars by past presidents (250 percent increase), still 70 percent of the 20 respondents still use either a Day-Timer type planner or a paper calendar. And again, 70 percent includes many of the 15 respondents who at some time after their terms as president began to use some type of PDA.

No matter how many extras there are in the Outlook programs, no matter how many new PDA improvements are made, the past presidents continue to rely on paper calendars and to-do lists, while no doubt printing out electronic versions too.

## Nature or Nurture?

For those who aspire to leadership roles in AALL, regardless of your comfort level with technology, you will need to have some skills in the area of planning and time management. Responding to the question “Was time management and planning a natural skill for you, or, did you have to learn/apply these skills?” 14 claimed some level of “natural ability.” However, of those 14, there was a range of explanations for that “natural ability.” Whether it was learned from parents, from modeling others, or from management courses and workshops, even those who had natural ability recommended some



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— Sally Holterhoff, AALL President  
2006-2007

type of further honing or practice of the skills.

Several also delineated the time management skill from planning ability (several associated list-making with

planning). For each of those who made that distinction, the planning skill was noted as more natural ability, while time management was much more challenging. Lolly Gasaway (1986-1987) says it best: “It was a natural skill for me—I am a chronic list maker! But, I have taken several time management courses and workshops over the years, and they really help.”

The lesson to be learned is that if you desire to lead successfully, you will need to acquire the time management and planning ability, whether naturally or through learning of some type, if you desire to succeed.

## The Power of Having a Goal

For those who referred to specific experiences in their presidencies, the idea of finding and/or setting a reasonable goal to accomplish in the year of their presidencies was highly recommended. Margaret Leary (1988-1989) says that she focused on developing some kind of way of impacting national policy using the unique skills of law librarians, and that led a few years later to the AALL Washington Affairs Office.

“As president, you only have one year to get things done,” says Janis Johnston (2003-2004). “Pick the one or two things you really want to accomplish and focus on getting those things done.”

There seemed to be a cup-half-full/cup-half-empty kind of way of looking at the experience of being president. Ann Fessenden says that “being AALL president is an incredible experience, but it’s also incredibly demanding.”

## Working Well with Others

Apparently, once you get that focus on the projects to accomplish, and whether you have the above cup-half-full or cup-half empty outlook, almost all of the past presidents note the special nature of leadership in a volunteer organization like AALL. You are assured to be working with

other people, whether by delegation or by depending on them to assist you (another cup-half-full/cup-half-empty comparison could be drawn here). The bottom line is that you need other AALL members to accomplish your goals.

“The lesson learned: set achievable goals and find great people to help you,” says Margaret Leary. “You have to delegate.”

There were no fewer than 15 other comments

on delegation specifically, from having to depend on others at the library where the president worked to cover the workload, to the more common dependence on colleagues in AALL.

Penny Hazelton states the bottom line in the form of a question: “Do you have to do this task, or could someone else do it instead?” She credited this question in part to her friend and colleague Don Dunn who died recently. She says he always had the seminal question: “What are you doing well that you do not need to do at all?”

When you determine it does need to be done and can be done by others, Sally Holterhoff (2006-2007) notes, “You can definitely learn from the leadership strengths and flaws of others. Enlist the help of colleagues you trust.”

### Motivation through Delegation

And the circle remains unbroken when you realize that in delegating you motivate or teach via experience.

“I try to remember to delegate as a leadership development tool for



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— Penny Hazelton, AALL President 1990-1991

others so they get experience,” says Carolyn Ahearn (1991-1992).

The other side is that you often learn by seeking advice or consultation. Patrick Kehoe (1995-1996) says that a “good leader makes appropriate use of others’ skills and experience through...consultation.”

Judy Meadows (1997-1998) says she turned to others inside and outside the profession, though she warns you have to be careful to avoid people who don’t admit they can’t do something.

Being a strong advocate of the idea of applying learned lessons, I was impressed to see that several past presidents note how what they learned as volunteer leaders could be applied back to their library positions.

### Resisting the Urge to Procrastinate

One final thought on time management, as I submit this article on the final day it is due, when I could not possibly put it

off any longer: I have to agree—nothing works like a deadline (artificial or real). This line in the sand ultimately acts as the most useful motivator.

When asked about procrastination and overcoming it, 11 of the 20 AALL past presidents say they had to overcome some level of procrastination.

And, if you believe the thesis that the best way to get a job done is to find a busy person (AALL president—past or otherwise), apparently nothing frees them up more to tackle the next project than a deadline. So, I leave you with these final thoughts from 32 years worth of past leaders of AALL, on the topic of procrastination and deadlines:

“This will be no easier tomorrow.”

Jane L. Hammond (1975-1976)

“Any delay in moving to accomplish a difficult goal will increase the challenges of success.” Roger Jacobs

“I set a deadline when I take on a project.” Jacquelyn Jurkins

“I often procrastinate because I want to limit the amount of time I spend on a particular task.” Penny Hazelton

“If I find myself procrastinating, I tend to find more to do to lessen the procrastination.” Carolyn P. Ahearn

“I use deadlines (self-imposed or otherwise) and to-do lists to manage procrastination.” Carol Avery Nicholson

“Get a head start on those projects, reports, etc....that are of real importance.” Janis Johnston

“I tend to do the analysis and planning well in advance, even if the execution occurs somewhat closer to the deadline.” Tory Trotta

“I think even the best organized of us have certain things we tend to avoid as long as possible...at least get started, which is often the hardest part.” Sally Holterhoff

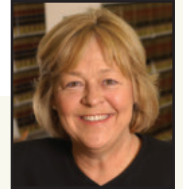


**“Any delay in moving to accomplish a difficult goal will increase the challenges of success.”**

— Roger Jacobs, AALL President 1981-1982

## “Whoever invented the PDA should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.”

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### Future Directions

Writing this article revealed several psychological and business constructs that could be pursued in further research. The current data merely scratches the surface in addressing the attributes of our successful leaders. In addition, the present research results provide a rich set of data in comparing librarian leaders to other types of leaders.

### Conclusion

The present study reaffirmed the level of service that people in our profession are driven to provide. A sincere acknowledgement to all those who have blazed trails, led the way for us to be where we are as an organization. And, from the author, thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us. You are truly the best of the best, the busy person whom we can always call on from your busy schedule to help us out, whether it is leading the organization into the future or taking the time to answer a law-lib discussion question or a survey that enlightens the rest of the organization. Future leaders thank you for your example and for your time. ■

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