

The Importance of Self-Care in Balancing Life and Work

WE HAVE ALL BEEN GUILTY of not sleeping well, not eating well, not being well, and not spending our time well—except for work, that is. Such is the life of most attorneys. As important as our work is, the better we take care of ourselves, the better we can perform in life and work. It is especially difficult for newer attorneys to find this balance when there is so much to learn, so much to prove, and so much work to do. How then do we take care of ourselves while pursuing our careers? Different things work for different people.

One purely technical procedure that can greatly facilitate balancing life and work is using a project management software. In addition to software that the firm may use to track cases and tasks, there is a personal project management software that can track and schedule both life and work tasks.

Asana is an efficient software for project management that is free, and there is also an app for it. With Asana, projects can be created by case and for each life project, including individual tasks for each project. Moreover, a realistic deadline can be assigned to each project. Asana will send a gentle reminder when deadlines are near or when a task is overdue. The app's visual representation of tasks helps determine whether there is overscheduling during any week or month. Apps like Asana are preferable to other calendars that have more limited capabilities. In working with a team, it is possible to collaborate, add files, and write comments for each task. Using project management software is a good step toward creating a better work/life balance.

As helpful as external devices and procedures can be to maintaining harmony in our lives, the tried and true method involves how we process daily input within our own bodies. Transcultural experience has validated attention to three main components.

Meditation. There are many forms of meditation techniques. Body scan meditation works well for high-stress careers in law. Unlike meditation aimed at miraculously clearing the mind of all thoughts, body scan meditation trains one to take the time to notice the physical manifestation of thoughts and emotions in the body. Here is a quick summary:

1. Find a quiet location and take 10 minutes to lie or sit down.
2. Take a few deep breaths.
3. Now, focus on each part of the body, step by step, starting with the head. Notice the sensation you are feeling. Then, move to the face, following the same process. Repeat the procedure throughout the entire body, spending five to 10 seconds on each part of your body.

The point of body scan meditation is to become aware that the sensations of your body are manifestations of your thoughts and emotions. With increased awareness, these feelings and sen-

sations will actually subside, allowing you to feel more focused and ready to take on the next task.

To assist with the process, there are also apps specifically designed for body scan meditation. Try Headspace, Smiling Mind, iMindfulness, or Mindfulness Daily.

Breathing. Too often, with the fast pace of being lawyers, we scarf down food, barely bothering to breathe. As obvious as it sounds, it is important to take time to breathe throughout the day. While some people swear by and benefit from deep breathing, others swear by the Buteyko method of breathing to create more

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oxygen flow to the organs. Either way, it is crucial to pay attention to breathing in a way that allows you to stay relaxed (as much as we can under tight deadlines).

Eating. The tacos many of us surely ingested for lunch this week attest that it is not always easy to eat well and fast. Between wondering whether the organic chicken I am buying is really organic—since it looks just as plump as the nonorganic chicken—and whether I will actually have time to cook a healthy meal from it, I buy at least three types of vegetables each week that require no cooking but make great snacks. I find this to be a great way to absorb vitamins and fiber, as well as to complement my otherwise questionable diet. Keep vegetables in the work refrigerator or take them to work every day. Just do it. Your doctor will be impressed at your next physical. I guarantee it.

The long and the short of it is: self-care is important to a happy and healthy life. So, do things that make you happy. This is the best form of self-care and absolutely necessary to sustain a long and successful career. The first question I ask myself after I wake up (even before checking my work e-mail) is: “What can I do today that will make me happy?” Sometimes what will make me happy is something as simple as getting coffee at my neighborhood mom-and-pop café, and sometimes it's carving out 15 minutes to go for a walk.

Create a plan with the project management software, breathe, meditate, eat well, and do things to make yourself happy, or, in the words of the Sufi mystic, Rumi: “Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray.” ■

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