

Let's Talk about Stress Management



By Nicole J. Poot

Every day, lawyers encounter situations that cause them significant stress. From heavy workloads and long hours to physically taking on other people's stress (namely our clients') lawyers are faced with stress at every turn in our professional lives. Couple that with the everyday stresses that life in general brings, it is not surprising that the legal profession has such high rates of burnout, substance abuse, and depression when compared to other professions.

Stress is the body's reaction to a change in condition that requires an adjustment or response. Stress causes a physical and behavioral response to a person, known as the stress response. Stress is something everyone experiences – regardless of your profession and truly it is not supposed to be a bad thing. Stress can be a wonderful motivator and is essential for survival. The “fight-or-flight” mechanism allows us to determine how and when to respond to peril. The body is well adapted for dealing with short-lived stressful events. However, if the stress response is stimulated too easily, or when there are too many stressors at one time, it can become harmful. In fact, overtime, prolonged activation of the stress response can cause excessive wear on the body that may cause the development of physical or mental illnesses such as high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression.

As attorneys, how we deal with our constant exposure to stress is incredibly important. If not managed, chronic stress can result in a downward spiral in our personal and professional lives. Chronic stress can lead to mistakes and all around poor job performance. It also often finds a way of overflowing and upsetting your family relationships and personal life, leading to even more stress. Sadly, it appears that many lawyers, instead of turning to stress management techniques, often seek to relieve their stress by abusing drugs and alcohol, which merely puts a band aid on the issue and puts the lawyer at risk of a whole host of issues including potential legal and financial troubles – undoubtedly leading to more stress. It doesn't help that, despite the numerous resources out there, for many of us, it is still difficult to talk about the stress associated with being a lawyer. We knew what we were getting into, right? It's all part of the job? Just, suck it up?

By taking the “suck it up approach” and not asking for help if we need it or by failing to take the time we need for ourselves, we are letting the inherently stressful practice of law and the stress that comes with this profession, take over and by doing so, we are doing irreparable harm to our mental and physical health. So, if you want to keep doing your job well and if you want lead a happier existence, it's

time to start making time for you. A perfect place to start is by trying out some stress management techniques, seeing what works for you, and making stress management a priority. I know personally, this has helped me exponentially both in my personal and professional life.

Now don't get stressed – this doesn't have to be an overly time-consuming exercise. The few minutes it takes to think about what works for you and how you are going to implement your techniques will surely pay dividends in the long run. Planning is the first step. The second of course, is sticking to your plan. There are countless ways people deal with work stress, and a quick Google search on stress management techniques for lawyers will give you numerous ideas specific to the legal profession to get you started.

For me, I have really been trying to implement stress management in my daily routine. Three daily stress management techniques that I've been trying to stick to in 2020 (and that have already helped me) are:



As you can see, the techniques that have proven useful to me are pretty simple and rely on common sense. The challenge with stress management is that sometimes the hardest things to do are the simplest and most obvious, especially when trying to keep up with the demands of the legal profession. I think the most important part in developing a strategy for stress management is acknowledging your own stressors and making sure the stress these stressors create is being offset with enjoyable experiences and that you are taking steps to help combat and minimize your stress. Lawyers make a huge difference in our society and self-care through stress management for lawyers matters to everyone involved. As such, as lawyers, we need to talk about it more and make it a priority.

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