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Summer breaks in routine help lawyers offset stress, reenergize

By Erin Clifford

Erin Clifford is partner and director of marketing and business development at Clifford Law Offices. She holds a master's degree in mental health counseling from Northwestern University and is a corporate wellness consultant and National Certified Counselor.

According to recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “lawyer” is the most stressful occupation in the United States. We can all relate to feeling the constant pressure to perform at a high level, work under tight deadlines and grapple with constant demands of clients, colleagues and the court system. Over time, this can lead to burnout and chronic stress.

However, you can find avenues to create more well-being and harmony in your everyday life. This summer, I encourage you to reset and reenergize your wellness routine by using the season to add some of the following healthy habits and lifestyle strategies. While it might seem counterintuitive to lawyers, taking a necessary pause in your busy professional lives will set you up for better performance and success in the long run.

Many lawyers struggle when they implement self-care initiatives because they take on too much at once. Instead of going from zero to 100, commit to small changes that are easily doable. Once you have mastered those, incorporate more into your lifestyle routine. For instance, summer can be an excellent time to renew your commitment to eating fresh food, exercising outdoors, staying hydrated and pursuing a new hobby.

During busy trial periods when your time is limited, add smaller pockets of self-care. Take a five-minute mental break to sit in a quiet space, do breath work, eat a nutritious snack, listen to a soothing song, stretch or go for a walk. Also, make time for sleep to boost your energy and mental clarity. After trial,

plan a vacation or take a few days off to recharge. This will give you something to look forward to and a much-needed break.

Commit to taking a “real” vacation

As a corporate wellness consultant and a partner at a fast-paced personal injury law firm, I understand firsthand how complicated it can be to leave work behind when you go on vacation. These are legitimate fears that stem from being a part of a work culture that has high expectations and values performance.

But just like we need to reboot our electronic devices, you need to reboot your body, mind and spirit. Otherwise you will not be at your best for your loved ones, clients and colleagues.

Use the following strategies to unplug and lessen any anxieties that may arise around using your vacation and paid time off.

- Communicate with your colleagues and clients about your absence. Supply plans and instructions to anyone who is covering your work.
- Establish clear boundaries with clients and coworkers about your availability and what type of urgency will constitute an “emergency” call or email.
- Commit to unplugging by turning off work email notifications and texts. If you feel it is necessary to regularly check your work communications, choose a one- to two-hour period each day and maintain this boundary with yourself.
- Give yourself permission to relax. Use this time away to enjoy the moment, the place where you are and the company you are with. Life is short, and you cannot get these experiences back.
- If your schedule does not allow for a formal vacation, take a staycation, and use your PTO time to relax at home.

While it may seem tempting to simply work your way through the summer, the often slower-paced season affords many lawyers an opportunity to squeeze in more self-care and a necessary reset.

Giving yourself a little oxygen is what your mind and body need to function at full capacity in your personal and professional lives. It will also set

you up for success when you get into the busier, more hectic fall season.

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