

Creating Work-Life Harmony for a Lawyer's Well-Being

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As lawyers, we have chosen a profession that revolves around success. We strive for the next big verdict in court, along with the accolades and honors, and we appreciate the financial benefits that come with a thriving career. However, over-prioritizing work can often lead to imbalances in other aspects of life causing stress, illness, and mental and emotional fatigue. Lawyers can embrace wellness and still be successful in their careers—it all begins with awareness.

Prevalent Health Challenges in the Legal Profession

A study published by the American Bar Association on Lawyer Assistance Programs and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation of nearly 13,000 currently-practicing lawyers found that between 21–36 percent qualify as “problem drinkers,” and many struggle from some level of mental health disorders: depression (28 percent), anxiety (19 percent), and stress (23 percent). The difficulties that lawyers are experiencing do not stop there. The study also found that feelings of “suicide, social alienation, work addiction, sleep deprivation, job dissatisfaction, a diversity crisis...work-life conflict, incivility, a narrowing of values so that profit predominates, and negative public perception” were also prevalent. These feelings are not just applicable to seasoned lawyers but impact individuals in their first years of practice.

The legal profession is well known for its demanding and high-pressure nature. Long hours, tight deadlines, difficult decisions, and maintaining positive client relationships all contribute to surmounting stress of a career in law. For many

young associates, the pinnacle of success in law is making partner at their firm. But the path to that achievement entails dedicating years and countless hours of their time to the profession. Naturally, this edges out other personal priorities in a lawyer's life including, but not limited to, their family and/or friends, relationships, self-care, health, spirituality, and more.

A 2023 study by researchers at the University of Minnesota revealed alarming rates of suicide and suicidal thoughts among lawyers, particularly young lawyers, who buy into a profession that leaves them “stressed, lonely, and overcommitted.” Of the lawyers surveyed, 16.9 percent shared suicidal ideation with the two youngest age groups (30 or younger and 31–40) accounting for the majority of the respondents.

A Career Can't Hug You Back

The heavy emphasis lawyers place on work blurs the line between their professional and personal identities. Many lawyers think that reaching a certain level of success, such as becoming a partner or obtaining a record-setting settlement, will lead to emotional fulfillment. However, they soon discover that these feelings are fleeting and are left wondering why.

As a corporate wellness coach and consultant for law firms and businesses, I hear this scenario all the time. I like to tell my clients that money and success cannot hug you back. It is important to find time to feed what nourishes us as humans and brings us the most life satisfaction. Failing to prioritize life domains such as family, self-care, and physical health can lead to burnout, anxiety, and feelings of low self-worth. While there is no such thing as perfect balance, lawyers can create har-

mony among their life domains by intertwining personal and professional goals.

Creating Balance Beyond the Courtroom

Begin the process of creating harmony in your life by examining these ten life domains to identify in which areas you may be overcompensating or would like to invest more. As you read through these, reflect on each category and consider your self-satisfaction with each domain.

Career. Some view their career as a necessary mechanism to provide a reasonable salary and health insurance, while for others it becomes an integral part of their identity. What does your career mean to you?

Finance. This domain is intrinsically linked to your career domain and can profoundly impact your overall mental and physical health. Individuals may have different expectations of what it means to be financially solvent or successful, so when you reflect on this domain, think of this in terms of how you are doing now—not what you may strive to have.

Family and Friends. It is important to make your family (biological or chosen) a top priority. As a busy lawyer, navigating and maintaining friendships can be hard. How are you doing in this category?

Community. Connecting with the community is one of the biggest contributors to longevity. It may be your bar association, church, neighborhood, recovery, health or social club. Do you feel connected to your chosen community?

Health. Your health is your wealth. If you do not prioritize it—such as regularly going to preventative medical appointments and immediately treating any health issues that arise—you will not thrive. In addition, check in with yourself and be mindful of your mental health.

Self-Care. This means taking the time to do things that bring you joy and incorporating positive supports into your routine to increase your mental and physical well-being. Self-care can include exercising, eating healthy foods, using your vacation time, getting a good night's rest, maintaining healthy boundaries, and practicing mindfulness.

Personal Development. As you age, it is important to continue to develop new skills and initiatives that can have a positive impact on your life. You may do this by taking a class, developing a new hobby, learning a language, or changing your environment. This helps to keep you fulfilled and prevent stagnation.

Spirituality. Spirituality generally encompasses the belief in something greater than yourself and varies widely from person to person. Whether you find this through an organized religion or other avenues—

mediation, personal prayer, nature, recovery community, music, art, or gratitude—nurturing your spiritual domain will bring you peace, especially during challenging times.

Contribution. How do you pay it forward in this world? Stepping outside yourself by serving on a philanthropic board, volunteering for a cause that is dear to your heart, mentoring others, or advocating for change in your community can bring joy and give your life meaning.

Attitude. Is the grass always greener on the other side? Viewing the world through an optimistic lens can have a profound impact on physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Life can be challenging but trying to lean into gratitude will bring into focus how green the grass is on your side.

The idea behind examining each of these domains is to provide insight into whether your life is providing the necessary harmony to meet your individual needs and overall life goals. The satisfaction in each domain does not have to be the same, but it needs to be enough for you to feel personally fulfilled as you move through the different stages of your life.

Creating work-life harmony is not a passive activity. It takes perseverance, commitment, flexibility, and grace. Once lawyers find a healthy rhythm that weaves together their life domains, they will experience the positive benefits of improved well-being in their professional and personal lives. LN

RESOURCES

- 🔗 National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, "[The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change](#)," *ABA News* (Aug. 14, 2017).
- 📖 Patrick R. Krill, Hannah M. Thomas, Meaghyn R. Kramer, Nikki Degeneffe, and Justin J. Anker, "[Stressed, Lonely, and Overcommitted: Predictors of Lawyer Suicide Risk](#)," *Healthcare* (Feb. 11, 2023).