

Living Light in Law

Ten ways to incorporate wellness into your life and your law practice.

WRITTEN BY SHANA STEIN FAULHABER

I started actively working on wellness during my first semester of 1L year to combat my mounting anxiety, insomnia, and imposter syndrome back in 2002. This led me on a decades-long journey through many modalities. Below are 10 practices I picked up along the way that have helped me maintain my well-being and fitness to practice law. I hope they'll serve you as well as they have me.



1. DO NO HARM

Seems easy enough. Don't go around clobbering people. Doctors even take this as an oath. But as lawyers, we frequently find ourselves embroiled in battle. So how do we reconcile?

When I first started attempting to practice this, I became vegan and wouldn't even harm a fly. Like I did with all these practices back then, I looked at them as black and white and behaved as though they existed in a vacuum.

Well, let me tell you what happens when you don't harm a fly that's gotten inside. A day or two later you wake up and find that you now have hundreds of flies! I also began refraining from speaking my truth in times where I really, really should have.

Eventually, I realized that practicing being a doormat also didn't serve me. I found that I'd been making myself small in a wide variety of ways that also didn't serve my clients. You get to exist and stand up for yourself and your clients and sometimes that means doing legal battle.

But you always have a choice in whether or not you're going to be kind while you do it. So that's how I think of it

these days—moving through the world and our law practices in a way that doesn't create unnecessary harm and attempting to leave things at least as good as I found them (if not better).

2. BE TRUTHFUL

Yeah buddy, can this one be a doozy. When I first started this practice, I decided to take it to the limit and be completely unfettered in my honesty—always and in all ways. Have you ever heard the phrase “brutal honesty”? Well, guess what? If you're employing brutality in your honesty, you're neglecting step one . . . to do no harm!

We can make our points and advocate for our clients without being mean or belittling. On more than one occasion, I've noticed areas of improvement in this arena as it relates to my client communications. Sometimes clients need to ask us the same questions several times before they really understand. But when I'd respond to emails with phrases like “as previously mentioned,” I discovered that it was being perceived by my clients as aggressive and hurtful. While hurting them wasn't my intention, my honesty about my frustration was unnecessary and unhelpful. We can be in our integrity and

honesty without sharing every single little thing in our brains. Truly.

3. DON'T TAKE WHAT'S NOT YOURS

Hopefully, dear reader, you already know that stealing from the store or other people is wrong. But when I started this in my law practice, it looked an awful lot like practicing not walking away with other people's pens in court. I'll never forget the look on a court clerk's face when I came back an hour later to give them a 50-cent Bic pen. She exclaimed that nobody ever brings them back. I explained that I was working on not taking things that weren't mine, even if it was by accident. And even if it was practically worthless.

But this practice can relate to much more than physical items. We can practice not stealing people's time by showing up to appointments when expected and being ready for our clients at the time designated. We can also practice not stealing people's thunder by allowing them to speak for themselves and making sure to give credit where credit is due. The applications are pretty much limitless.

4. PRACTICE MODERATION

This one's never been a strong suit of mine, but it's all the same important. I think many of us tend to naturally be workaholics. And many of us are prone to all-or-nothing thinking. The practice of being moderate offers us the opportunity to be mindful of our consumption. Not just food or drink, but in our relationship with all people, places, and things—even shopping or TV. Setting boundaries and time limits on our calendar can help tremendously. As can counseling or journaling to create some introspection around why and how we're doing what we're doing.

5. LOOSEN YOUR GRIP ON ATTACHMENTS

This is hard but so important. We tend to think of ourselves as problem solvers. We put our all into trying to create the best possible outcomes for ourselves and our clients. But ultimately, we must loosen our grip and know that not everything is up to us. It behooves us to practice trust and release: trust that we have done enough and release the expectation that we can control forces outside ourselves.

6. BE CLEAN

Don't you feel like you can think better when your workstation is clean and free of clutter? I know I do. Same for my inbox. Practicing cleanliness in all matters of our law practice is a wonderful observance. Allow it to evolve over time and just notice where your practice could use a little freshening up. Spring cleaning doesn't have to be reserved for just spring!

7. FOCUS ON CONTENTMENT

It's a dish best served when everything is going our way, but even when we wish we had more or better, gratitude practice makes the best of what we've got. I like to stop and reflect on how far I've already come and live in the moment of who and what surrounds me. An added side effect is that it

seems to help propel us to the next right thing as well. It's easy to get stressed about where our next case or client is going to come from, but trusting that we're making the right moves, and enjoying the new, seems to have a way of getting us there with a little extra grace.

8. TAKE DISCIPLINED ACTION

This is the kind of deep diving fire of the belly inside discipline that helps you push through that one more hour of caselaw research to get ready for the big hearing . . . when you just want to dive into a pint of Ben and Jerry's. If you struggle with discipline, I'd encourage you to set a goal and start small. Hold yourself accountable by putting it in your calendar. You've got this!

9. LOOK INWARD

It's important to take stock and inventory. Notice what's working. And be honest with yourself about areas of improvement. But, don't forget to do no harm. That principle also involves how we treat ourselves. So be kind!

This is a great place to work on a little journaling. Or creative expression. Or find a support group to talk with. As it relates to your law practice, this might mean taking that dreaded look at your financials. Or maybe you'd like to join me in my monthly practice of what I call "full file sweeps." I spend a day around the middle of each month going through each one of my current case files. I'll make internal notes, send emails, tackle action items, and otherwise see what needs to be done. Looking inward at my cases on a regular basis creates a lot of peace for me and is such a worthwhile practice.

10. LET GO

We simply aren't going to win every trial or case or fight or transaction. I always say that we don't make the law or the facts. We do the best we can, and then we attempt to rest easy knowing that we gave it our all. When we come home at the end of the day, hopefully we're able to put our sword down at the door and turn our full attention to self-care, family, and other non-legal affairs.

As we embark upon the beginning of 2025, we have a choice to start anew in all respects and create the kind of year that we always hope for. It's my sincere wish that this is the year you've been waiting for. If you or a colleague is in need of support, please contact the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (TLAP) at 1-800-343-TLAP. For added support, come visit a group I started on Facebook by searching for "Texas Lawyers Wellness." Wishing you a happy, joyous, and light 2025! **TBJ**



SHANA STEIN FAULHABER

is a criminal defense attorney and certified mediator in Dallas. She has owned and operated a solo law practice since 2008 and has been teaching yoga since 2009. After graduating from the University of Miami School of Law in 2005, Faulhaber worked for the Smith and then Dallas County District Attorney Offices, where she was able to try over 100 jury trials in a few years before going into private practice. As her yoga and law practices grew side by side, she discovered the need to bring wellness to lawyers, and in 2021, started Texas Lawyers Wellness as a private Facebook group for Texas attorneys.