

MINDFULNESS AND TIME

Four strategies lawyers can use that lead to greater productivity and better well-being in their lives and practices.



We have all heard the saying “a lawyer’s time and advice are his stock and trade.” Keeping track of our time and placing value on that time in the marketplace is the practice of law. Time is a finite resource. We all have the exact same amount of it in a day and how we use it is an important indicator of our priorities. Lawyers are notoriously high-level, goal-driven, detail-oriented people who set goals, achieve them, and then move on to the next one. Developing a new relationship with time through a consistent mindfulness practice can radically change your life for the better by giving you more energy, more focus, more patience, more concentration, better sleep, and more bandwidth to deal with your clients’ problems daily. And it will help you fulfill your ethical “duty of competency” as stated in the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct.

Eckhart Tolle’s book *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* introduced me to the concept that the past is an illusion and the future is an illusion. When you stay in the present moment, your fears and anxieties are not happening that moment. It is only when you are thinking about the past or ruminating about the future that you get distracted and your energy wanes. I began to train my mind to examine my thoughts. When Tolle stressed that all we have is now, I realized that I had lived so much of my life in the past or the future, all the while missing some of the precious moments. There is nothing we can do about the past. How many times do we replay a negative scene in our minds, never realizing that we are using the precious life force we have in a way that is not the highest and best use of our time? When the message about time sunk in, I began to build a new set of responses to my thoughts. You can move them off the stage of your mind and keep only the things that are in your best interest on the main stage. When we think about the future, it is also an illusion, especially when we have fears and are projecting our fears into it. Both of those lines of thought are negative energy, and they also deplete us. Think about a negative

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experience you have had—how do you feel when you are thinking about it? Your energy is low. You don’t feel good. Now think about something for which you are grateful. What does it do to your energy?

It raises it. When you have better energy, you feel like getting more done.

In my work on this subject, I have come up with four strategies to integrate mindful practices into your time and energy management that will lead you to greater productivity in your legal practice, more financial success, and greater overall well-being. And you will begin to really start enjoying each day deeply in new ways.

1. SHIFT FROM TIME MANAGEMENT TO ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Premise: Traditional time management focuses on squeezing more tasks into the day, but it doesn’t account for the natural ebbs and flows of your energy levels. Mindfulness encourages you to work with your energy, optimizing productivity during peak times and resting during low-energy periods. This new practice will help you take care of your clients more efficiently.

Practice and Examples:

- **Mindful Breaks:** Instead of powering through work until exhaustion, incorporate mindful breaks to recharge. For example, if you notice your energy dipping after lunch, take a 10-minute walk outside or practice deep breathing to reset.
- **Energy Mapping:** Start your day with a quick body scan meditation to assess your energy levels. Use this information to plan your day. For instance, schedule demanding tasks like drafting legal briefs or strategizing in the morning when your focus is sharpest and reserve administrative work for afternoons when your energy naturally wanes. If you are all out of empathy by 3 p.m., don’t meet clients after 3 p.m. Just do other tasks in those last hours of your day.

Benefit: By aligning your work with your natural energy cycles, you will enhance your efficiency and effectiveness, ultimately leading to increased productivity and a more balanced relationship with time.

2. REFRAME STRESS AS A TIME THIEF

Premise: Stress and anxiety consume mental bandwidth, slowing down your thought processes and clouding your judgment. This often leads to procrastination or inefficient work, robbing you of valuable time. Maintain a close rein on your thoughts, making sure that they are focused on the present moment and your energy will soar.

Practice and Examples:

- **Mindful Meditation:** Dedicate 10 minutes in the morning to a mindfulness practice that focuses on breath awareness. For instance, before starting your workday, sit quietly, close your eyes, and take deep breaths, focusing on the sensation of air entering and leaving your body. This can set a calm tone for the day and reduce the reactive patterns that stress creates. Over time, you build your meditation muscle, and it gets incorporated into your subconscious mind.
- **Mindful Transitions:** Use mindful breathing during transitions between meetings or tasks to reset. For example, if you just finished a tense client call, take a few deep breaths before jumping into your next task. This helps prevent stress from one task from bleeding into the next.

Benefit: By mitigating stress, you can approach each task with a clear and focused mind, reducing errors, enhancing decision-making, and saving time that would otherwise be lost to anxiety-driven distractions. You won't miss that statute of limitations deadline or not communicate with your client thus avoiding any issues of ineffective assistance of counsel.

3. MASTER THE ART OF LETTING GO

Premise: Perfectionism and dwelling on past mistakes wastes your valuable time and drains your energy. Mindfulness teaches you to let go of what you cannot change, freeing you to focus on the present. Perfect is good, but done is better. Try not to take things personally.

Practice and Examples:

- **Nightly Reflection:** End your workday with a five-minute reflection on what went well and what didn't. If something didn't go as planned, acknowledge it without judgment and let it go. For example, if a case didn't go your way, recognize it, reflect briefly on what you can learn, and then release it. Working hard won't kill you. Ruminating about work is what will kill you.
- **Mindful Journaling:** Spend a few minutes journaling about your workday, writing down any lingering frustrations or regrets. Once written, consciously decide to let them go, focusing on what you can do tomorrow to improve rather than fixating on past errors. Journaling is the best form of therapy. Once you write it, it's out of your system. We don't want to hold negative thoughts in our bodies.

Benefit: Letting go helps you move forward with renewed focus and prevents the past from consuming your present, leading to more productive use of your time and mental energy. A rested

lawyer is a more productive and effective lawyer.

4. ENHANCE CREATIVITY AND PROBLEM-SOLVING THROUGH MINDFULNESS

Premise: Mindfulness fosters a flexible mindset, enhancing creativity and problem-solving skills essential for complex legal work. It helps you break free from rigid thinking patterns that can limit your effectiveness. You want to be able to problem solve for clients so that you can help them most effectively.

Practice and Examples:

- **Mindful Walking Breaks:** When facing a challenging problem, take a mindful walk. Focus on the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the sounds around you, or the feeling of the air on your skin. For example, if you're struggling with a difficult legal argument, a short walk can help you return to the task with a fresh perspective and new ideas. Many of us get our best ideas in the shower. Any relaxing activity can free up your mind for problem solving.
- **Mindful Visualization:** Use visualization techniques to mentally step through complex problems. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and visualize the issue from different angles, imagining creative solutions without the pressure of immediate decision-making.

Benefit: Mindfulness enhances your ability to see beyond conventional solutions, allowing you to approach problems with innovative ideas that save time and add value to your work.

CONCLUSION:

Changing your relationship to time is a process and you will notice subtle differences in your legal practice as you develop your mindfulness skills. Small, incremental changes over time can produce big results. Don't try to do it all at once. These mindfulness strategies will redefine your relationship with time by allowing you to manage your energy, reduce your stress, and enhance your focus. By incorporating mindfulness into your daily routine, you create a more productive, less stressful work environment that allows you to achieve more with less effort. This shift not only improves your professional success as a lawyer but also enhances your overall quality of life, enabling you to enjoy both work and personal time more fully. Ultimately, mindfulness empowers you to work smarter, foster better client relationships, and achieve a balance that translates into greater financial success and well-being. I promise you—I've done it and it works. What I would have given to have known these things earlier in my legal practice, but now that I do know them, I'm not wasting another second! Please let me know if you have any tips, sources, or experiences with mindfulness you want to share at melanie@legalinsightinc.com. **TBJ**



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