



Mindful Lawyering Newsletter from the Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law
Committee of the New York City Bar Association

Issue No. 2 | Spring 2022

Welcome to the Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Committee Newsletter!

About Us: We are a recent Committee of the New York City Bar Association and are here to serve the legal community in pursuit of balance. The Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law Committee provides programming, events, and resources to support member's wellness through the practice of mindfulness, including meditation, mindful movements, and other modalities that help bring one back to the present moment. Studies have found that mindfulness practices can assuage stress and anxiety, enhance emotional resilience, decrease implicit bias and reactivity, and increase creativity and productivity.

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Message from Chair, Lisa Podemski, Esq.

I am so proud and grateful for what our committee has accomplished this season to support City Bar members' well-being! We created programming and publicized Well-being Week in Law and Mental Health Awareness Month, both in May, in close collaboration with Eileen Travis from Lawyer's Assistance Program (LAP) and others. Our work was even recognized by Sheila Boston with a Bar of Hope award! We have released two episodes of our Committee podcast Mindful Lawyering, have our third book club coming up, and this is our second newsletter. I am passionate about our mission to bring mindfulness and wellness to the City Bar and the broader legal community.

I just returned from a week at the Omega Institute where I had the honor and joy to learn from two of my amazing teachers Pema Chödrön and Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams. Mindfulness means many things to many people, and it goes beyond meditation. Living mindfully supports our own well-being but the ultimate goal is to be in compassionate service to others. Our practice goes beyond the meditation cushion and the yoga mat, though those are still vital spots to plant ourselves as often and however we can.

This was Pema's last public program which I am still in awe that I was able to attend, and her messaging focused on the practice of Tonglen. Tonglen, which literally means sending and taking, is a practice of awakening tenderness and compassion with a longingness to help. It takes a lot of courage to be willing to be cracked open and exposed to the suffering of the world, but this practice does just that. We breathe in trauma and suffering and breathe out relief. The goal is to do that for the suffering of others, but that is the third stage of Tonglen practice, we first must begin with ourselves. One works on building courage and compassion within oneself first. One can breathe in their own fear and frustration or other uncomfortable feelings we as humans tend to avoid or suppress and use the practice to first make friends with our own emotions and experiences.

We must develop a tenderness with ourselves before we can have true compassion for others. When we truly allow ourselves to be comfortable in confronting our own suffering only then can we know that all living things suffer, hope, and fear in the same way. Only then can we truly act to try to alleviate the pain of others. The practice is a foundation, so we are able to first embody the compassion and drive needed to then act to help make sustainable change. Pema, always with a smile, sometimes a smirk, said it best, "always have comfortable shoes, but meditate first."



Thanks to our contributing members Erin T. Gleason-Alvarez, Aimee T. Latorre, Jolevette Mitchell, Katuska Moure and Wendy Silva.

To submit comments, suggestions or your written work for consideration in future newsletters, email: mindfulness.citybar@gmail.com

MWBL Committee Launches Mindful Lawyering Podcast with host Aimee T. Latorre, Esq.



How do we practice law mindfully, with purpose and intention, rather than reactively? This question is what we discuss on the newly launched Mindful Lawyering podcast of the Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Committee. According to one recent Bloomberg Law survey of law firm and in-house attorneys, attorney burnout is at an all-time high and attorney well-being took a severe downturn in 2021. Among the attorneys reporting worsening well-being, they also reported disrupted sleep, increased anxiety, personal relationship issues, personal health issues and more disruptive well-being issues.

According to another recent study by Finances Online, the average number of emails a person receives for work is about 100 per day. That number has steadily increased over the past few years, and will likely continue to increase. That constant interruption in your work day can make it very difficult to get into a flow state of work, which increases happiness and productivity, rather than a reactionary state. That is not including communications such as Slack, Teams, social media, text messages on your phone, etc. Add in personal messages, and attorneys may easily get over 300 messages per day, each with varying degrees of urgency, some requiring immediate responses while others none at all, all in addition to our regular workload. This constant stream of communication and interruptions is just one of the many issues attorneys juggle.

The benefits of developing a mindfulness practice are vast. According to another Harvard study, leaders who practice mindfulness within an organization, not only reduce their own stress but the stress of the employees around them, and also increase their organization's bottom line. A mindfulness practice increases resilience, reduces depression and anxiety, improves emotional and physical well-being and has many more benefits. However, how do attorneys with a full workload find time to slow down and incorporate a mindfulness practice into their lives?

In the first episode of Mindful Lawyering released in early March, I interviewed members of the Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Committee about their mindfulness journeys and how they each have endeavored to strike a balance between striving in their legal careers and their personal wellness. Lisa Podemski, an attorney for children at the Legal Aid Society - Juvenile Rights Practice, Stacy Schaffer a private coach, and Alejandra Vargas an immigration associate at Duane Morris, shared a variety of useful tools that listeners can incorporate into their own legal and mindfulness practices. We start with the basics. Guests define mindfulness and explain what it looks like in the day-to-day practice of three busy attorneys, with practice tips that attorneys can start implementing today, even when you only have 2 minutes. The podcast ends with a 5-minute meditation.

In the next episode of Mindful Lawyering, we address how to mindfully set boundaries with clients. You can listen to the Mindful Lawyering podcast on the NYC Bar's Media page, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, or Stitcher. We hope you can join us!

Click [here](#) for episode 1.

Mindful Moment - Adding Aromatherapy to Your Practice

by Katuska Moure, J.D.



There are many benefits associated to mindfulness, including helping to slow down the pace of our busy lives, feeling an increase in gratitude and self-acceptance, as well as learning to regulate emotional well-being. Adding aromatherapy to your practice can further enhance one's mental, physical, and emotional well-being and the effects that aromatherapy has on our lives can be broad. Essential oils have been shown to help regulate mood, bring about a sense of calm, comfort, and help with attention and focus. Adding essential oils to a mindful breath practice can help anchor our attention to our breath using our sense of smell and touch. When we recognize a pleasant or familiar scent it can elevate our mood or help us feel relaxed. Aromatherapy triggers chemical olfactory sensors in the brain linked to emotion and memory.

If you are new to essential oils and don't have a favorite, try lavender, eucalyptus, lemongrass, or peppermint. There are also pre-mixed fragrances that can be used to improve concentration or to help with sleep. Find a scent that you would like to breathe in for a few moments.

Mist the fragrance in the air or place a drop on your wrists, forehead or temples and discover what arises. Close your eyes for a moment and breathe in through your nose. What aromas do you notice? What emotions or physical sensations occur in your body? What other aromas do you find in your surroundings? Try to name each scent? After a few moments, you most likely have achieved mindful awareness with the help of aromatherapy.

This simple exercise reveals how the mind-body connection can be activated through our sense of smell. I invite you to incorporate aromatherapy as another tool in your mindfulness practice.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE LETTER “T”

by Wendy Silva, Esq.



I recall watching Sesame Street as a child and rejoicing in the sponsoring letter of the day. I had a Fisher Price schoolhouse with a magnetic alphabet board and I would spend hours rearranging the letters to teach my wooden schoolchildren new words, declaring confidently, “Brought to you by the letter...” I suppose that is when my word obsession began.

Fast forward to 2010: I begin to learn about meditation. Living in New York City, I would hop from one meditation center to the next in search of the one I might find “fitting.” My popcorn style of learning about meditation was haphazardly grounding. Around the same time, I began learning about mediation and how to bring a semblance of control to the chaos of family and matrimonial law, and wondering about alternative ways to resolve disputes.

While the two practices seem unrelated, my collision course of studies inevitably led from deep contemplation and focused attention – to breath – and then to mindfully considering the process of dispute resolution. Of course, the words “meditation” and “mediation”, are only one letter apart. The absence or placement of a tiny “t” in a Google search will lead you either to the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh or to Roger Fisher and William Ury. But there are deep similarities. The practice of meditation and focus of attention on the breath are extremely useful when engaged in a mediation session. A cornerstone of mediation is the encouragement of active listening – this allows space for one person to speak and the other to genuinely listen without rehearsing their retort. The contemplative practice of sitting for even as little as 10 minutes a day can allow for the spaciousness of “no agenda,” and gradually permit the nuances of another’s point of view. Meditation techniques which achieve calmness and a clear mind help facilitate the settlement of disputes and enhance the practices of mediation, settlement negotiation, and even courtroom arguments.

Meditation is an opportunity for internal transformation and a way to cultivate understanding towards a sense of peace: exactly what we want in a fruitful mediation. This is where the parties have an opportunity to recognize that their conflict can be a win-win situation, transforming them into something they were not when they first entered the room (or sat on a cushion).

While focusing on the breath during meditation, we label our random thoughts as “thinking” and then return to the breath when we notice our distraction. I have referred to this as “dropping the story.” This is what we ask of the parties, if only for a brief moment: seeing what the source of the dispute is and working through the “stuckness” of the process. This takes time, patience, understanding, and a willingness to go deep within our discursive minds.

Meditation “tunes” us into our bodies. A body scan during meditation will reveal areas where we are holding tension. When fine-tuned, we can recognize the signals our bodies give even during a mediation session. By letting us know whether something is not quite right, we can use the space to respond thoughtfully. Perhaps utilizing a practice called S.T.O.P. (Stop Take a Breath Observe and Proceed) can help curtail speech that might otherwise halt a resolution. As Sharon Salzberg put it in her book *Real Happiness*, “[m]indfulness helps us see the differences between what’s happening and the stories we tell ourselves.”

While all meditators may not be perfect mediators and vice-versa, all mediators can still benefit from a meditation practice. Going forward then, lets discover the benefit of adding and dropping the “I” within our practices.



art by Jolevette Mitchell, Esq.

Why Taking a Break is a Valuable Negotiation Strategy

by Erin E. Gleason Alvarez

Anyone who has ever been in a negotiation has felt some combination of tensions building, anger festering, and anxieties creeping in. Because, let's face it, negotiating often comes with stress. It's important to remember that you can always ease these symptoms by taking a break. Taking a break during negotiations is not only completely acceptable, but it can also be beneficial when it comes to making you a better negotiator. Furthermore, taking a break is one of the best negotiation strategies since it will help you reset and regain your composure. Here are some considerations on why you should take a break during negotiations and what to do when you are on that break.

Time to Think

While you are negotiating, it is easy to get caught up in your own mind and to start overthinking, or thinking about issues that are not particularly helpful at the negotiation table. There may be volumes of information to take in while you are negotiating, and it can be difficult to have time to analyze the impact or veracity of that material. Taking a break allows you to assess your position, whether you need to adjust your strategy, or request additional time to make these decisions.

Practice Mindfulness

Negotiations can be vexing. Each party to the conversation has their own interests and objectives. When these ideals are in conflict, tension, frustration, and strained communications can result. By taking a break, you give your mind and body a chance to recuperate and regain your center. This, in turn, helps you return to negotiations with heightened clarity and purpose.

Mindfulness is a powerful tool that can greatly assist when taking a break in negotiation. Here, you have the opportunity to clear your mind and to calm down so that your decision-making process is restored to a more even cadence. Once you are feeling more centered and grounded, it is easier to see what it is you want to achieve out of the negotiation – to appreciate what is really important.

So, now that we know why taking a break is one of the best negotiation strategies, what should you do when you take a break?

When taking a break, you can do simple things such as taking a brief walk, listening to calming music, or sitting in silence. So, before you enter into a discussion that has the potential to set off your trigger points, you should figure out what is relaxing to you.

Personally, the best thing for me to do in a break from negotiations is to meditate. Meditating on your negotiation break will calm your emotions as you will be focusing on your breathing and inner calm. With just a few minutes in meditation, you can feel more grounded and be prepared for anything that comes at you in the negotiations.



Past and Future MWBL Events

[Yoga for Lawyers Mindfulness Breaks](#)
[Replays](#)

Unlocking the Power of Sleep to Thrive in
Work and Life: recording coming soon

Mindful Lawyering Podcast
[Episode 1](#)

[Episode 2](#)

[CLE Webinar: Managing Attorney Stress](#)
[with Colleen Saidman Yee and Rodney](#)
[Yee](#)

[June 14: Mindfulness Book Club](#)

Interested in joining our Committee?
Visit our [MWBL Committee page](#)

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