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IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

FIVE WAYS MINDFULNESS CAN BENEFIT LAWYERS

Mindfulness means being in the present and accepting each moment without preference or judgment. It's an ancient practice that comes from Buddhism. It's not a religious practice; rather, it's a way to engage in our lives with care and awareness.

The primary way to practice mindfulness is through meditation, where you sit quietly and settle your mind and body. It's interesting to note that every religion includes a practice of sitting silently, whether in meditation or in prayer.

So how can cultivating mindfulness benefit lawyers? Here are several ways.

1. Reduced stress and anxiety. Regularly practicing mindfulness allows you to be in the present moment. The less time you spend worrying about the future (which you can't control) or thinking about the past (which you can't change), the less stress and anxiety you'll experience.

2. Response vs. reaction. Most of us feel as if we're in a constant state of crisis, rushing from one urgent activity to the next. How often do you look up from your work to find it's already 3 p.m.? You've managed to put out some fires but haven't gotten to the really important work. With mindfulness, you'll learn to respond to situations, prioritizing your life so you can focus on what's really important.

3. More happiness. Mindfulness allows you to wake up to your life and "smell the roses." Research shows that with mindfulness we can raise our baseline of happiness by paying attention to the small details of life – a smile from a stranger

or tying your child's shoelaces. Instead of having your mind ruminating over the next day's hearing, you can enjoy being at the dinner table with your spouse.

4. More compassion. Being a lawyer is hard work. We witness a lot of suffering, which can lead to vicarious trauma. Attorneys may try to shield themselves from this pain by disconnecting, but that isn't an effective strategy. A better way of coping, one that mindfulness enables, is to practice being compassionate – toward yourself for being in this difficult position and toward your client, who is experiencing pain.

5. Better listening skills. How often have you had the experience of talking with someone when you notice that you've checked out of the conversation? Or maybe you're so busy thinking of what you're going to say in response that you aren't really listening to the speaker? Mindfulness allows you to be in the moment so you can fully engage in the conversation and listen but, at the same time, tune in to your inner state.

One-Minute Mindfulness Exercise

1. Have a timer ready and find a comfortable seated position. Make sure you're sitting upright, with shoulders back and both feet firmly on the ground.

2. Set the timer for one minute.

3. Breathe in and out. Simply pay attention to the sensation of the breath as it goes in and out. You'll soon notice that your attention has drifted away from the breath. When you notice this, come back to the breath. As you listen to your breathing,

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and flow with it, you will be in the present – the core of mindfulness.

Many people find it helpful to use a guided meditation. You can find a number of these online. You can also practice mindfulness while you're walking, checking e-mail, and at other points in your day. Consider increasing the time you devote to your mindfulness exercise as you become more skilled at the practice.

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