

IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFE

Lawyers, as a group, are more achievement-oriented than average, and most would say they want to achieve a high quality of living. Quality of life is subjective, however; each of us must define what this means for us personally. There are some global descriptors like comfort, security, good health, achieving a level of excellence in our work, feeling well-connected, or prospering. We usually think that high-quality of living goes beyond meeting our basic needs and ventures into the land of luxury. Despite fantasies of fame and fortune, studies in human development indicate that what contributes most significantly to the quality of life, indeed to life itself, are close, caring relationships.

Current research shows that meaningful emotional attachments are more significant than previously known. Even as we seem to develop into increasingly self-sufficient beings on the physical level (from infancy through adult maturity), we continue to need care, support, and recognition from significant others. This is true in both our personal lives and in our professional roles. There are myriad additional factors that lead to high-quality living, of course, but the value of our relationships with others is foundational.

At the University of Toronto's Quality of Life Research Unit, quality of life is defined as "the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life." Their Quality of Life model is based on the categories "being, belonging, and becoming," respectively, who one is, how one is connected to one's

environment (meaning relational), and whether one achieves his or her personal goals, hopes, and aspirations. This model gives us another way to consider the quality of our lives. You might ask yourself how you feel about the person you are, how your needs for belonging are being met, and how your own adult development is going.

The Oregon State Bar's Quality of Life Committee aims to encourage members to discover how to live meaningful lives, with the hope of nurturing each lawyer's personal development. Satisfaction with the life you live, or the sense of contentment you feel in your heart, may be the most significant indicator of the quality of your life. Feeling at ease with yourself is achieved primarily through deep attachments, which develop through the process of recognition by significant others. Recognition doesn't necessarily mean public awards. Sometimes the most satisfying recognition is found in daily interpersonal acknowledgement and appreciation. Approval and validation lead to greater satisfaction and a more productive work life. So you can further your attachment with others by offering recognition, as well as by acknowledging your own need for it.

Given the understanding of how strengthening our bonds with others is key to improving the quality of our lives, here are some suggestions:

- Make eye contact whenever you are speaking or listening to others. Eye contact is a powerful connector. It was the original way we knew our caregivers were tuned into us.

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- Listen more, including “active listening” skills like making reflective comments. If you can also reflect how the other might be feeling, showing empathy, all the better.

- Begin a practice of making positive feedback statements, perhaps one each day. Nurturing others will help them intrinsically and will also increase their connection with you.

In closing, I offer you this poem from Maya Angelou (1928-2014).

*We need joy as we need air. We need to love
as we need water.*

We need each other, as we need the earth we share.

*We are blessed that there is within our reach
enough of all we need.*

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Quality of Life Committee.*