



THRIVING...Despite Challenge: A Brief Roadmap for Lawyers

It is no surprise that each of us responds differently to life's changes and challenges: the birth of a child, the death of a parent, a good job obtained, a good job lost, a financial success, a financial setback. No two of us react in exactly the same way. That's natural and to be expected. Given that, we each have our own unique life experiences, how we deal with changes, challenges, and difficulties when they occur is often a reflection of our past experiences, habits, and behaviors, and our particular view of the world. Thus, how we *thrive* – how we individually manage to successfully function in good times and in difficult times will be different for different people. Despite how we may individually navigate this process, however, thriving is ultimately the goal that most of us seek to achieve.

“Thriving” is an elusive concept. For those both in and out of the legal profession, it can *generally* be understood as the ability to experience well-being in each of the primary dimensions of one's life. These dimensions typically include:

- Our emotional and physical health,
- Our occupational satisfaction and financial stability,
- Our intellectual and creative enjoyment,
- Our sense of social belonging and connectedness, and
- Our existential sense of meaningfulness and purpose.

That's a tall order! More often than not, we experience more success in some dimensions than in others at any given point in time – and that's to be expected. Sometimes, however, factors entirely outside our control intrude on our lives in very dramatic ways that significantly challenge our overall ability to thrive. It is during these times – and *especially* during these times – that we first need to identify those things over which we do have some control, those things over which we don't *and* we need the ability (i.e., wisdom) to recognize the difference between these two realities.

For example, when uncontrollable circumstances impact an important dimension of our lives, say, economic security, does that mean we have no control over other dimensions,

say, emotional and physical health or social connection? The answer is obvious. When events occur and make uncontrollable for a time one part of our lives, our overall health and well-being – our ability to thrive - depends upon our continuing to attend to other, more controllable, aspects of our lives. Thus, recognizing what is realistically within our control is a *necessary starting point* if we are to maintain and nourish our thriving skills in difficult times.

A second critical action we need to take during challenging times is to actively seek out and use resources that are available to strengthen and nurture those important (and controllable) dimensions of our lives. That also is a tall order! But tall orders do not mean impossible orders, even for lawyers who are more accustomed to being a resource than seeking a resource.

There are two common stumbling blocks when seeking resources. One is *uncertainty* about the impact of the challenges faced and the other is quite simply identifying reliable resources. With respect to uncertainty (the quintessential fear of most people, especially lawyers), there are three helpful things to keep in mind:

1. Uncertainty often produces fear, stress, and anxiety responses; it's a product of the natural, physiological fight-or-flight response our bodies are biologically designed to experience in the face of a potential threat;
2. Uncertainty, and the anxiety it produces, frequently causes us to catastrophize, to fall victim to the negative thinking that so often accompanies the fear and stress of uncertainty – in much the same way that our clients sometimes unrealistically expect the worst;
3. And the Good News: Uncertainty in one dimension of our lives does not mean uncertainty in all dimensions; in fact, from a mental health standpoint, nurturing *other* areas of our lives (e.g., social connectedness or engaging in healthy, meaningful activities) *will improve* our emotional coping skills and allow us the emotional freedom and flexibility to find healthy emotional balance and seek helpful resources when needed.

At the end of the day, if we are to maintain our well-being during difficult and challenging times – if we are to thrive despite adversity – each of us has two directions to look: to others and to ourselves. Virtually all mental health professionals unanimously agree that we are social creatures– *we cannot thrive without community*. This is true for extraverts and introverts alike; both require social connection, though to different degrees.

It is absolutely imperative that we ratchet up our social contact with other people during times of adversity. If personal contact is not possible, we have the good fortune of 21st century technology. There are a variety of video communication applications and messaging platforms readily available today for us to stay in touch (e.g., Google Hangout, WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook messenger, and Zoom). And, oh yes, there are always telephones and cell phones. Social connection during difficult times is the equivalent of the medicine we need to help keep us healthy.

Equally important is the need for us to attend to our own self-care. This may involve doing activities we enjoy and find meaningful – gardening, yoga, meditation, reading, walking, playing with your pet, etc. Doing these activities consistently and on at scheduled times is best. Self-care programs can also be coordinated with friends and relatives so our social connections are enhanced. A healthy diet and sleep regimen are also essential. Excessive use of drugs and alcohol are problematic during stressful times; they may provide a momentary respite, but have yet to be shown to make one's difficulties go away. See, *Well-Being Tools and Techniques*, below.

Thriving despite challenges can itself be challenging. But it definitely can be done. And, for each of us, it needs to be done so that when the challenges are over, and life returns to normal, our well-being will have been as successfully maintained and nourished as possible, and perhaps even strengthened in many unexpected ways.

The Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP) is an excellent starting place when seeking short-term counseling, resource information, and mental health and substance use advice and recommendations. The OAAP has served the Oregon legal community for nearly forty years. It has five experienced attorney counselors available to Oregon lawyers, judges, and law students. It is confidential, voluntary, and free. www.oaap.org

Douglas S. Querin, JD, LPC, CADC1
Attorney Counselor
Oregon Attorney Assistance Program
DouglasQ@oaap.org

Research-Based Well-Being Tools & Techniques ... that Really Work!!!

1.	<p>Breathing - all sorts of different ways to do this. The most important part is to breathe slowly and deeply. It is the fastest and best way to communicate with the non-verbal part of your brain.</p> <p>http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html http://cdn.marksdailyapple.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/NPRDeepBreathing.mp3</p> <p>APPS- Breathe2Relax</p>
2.	<p>Meditation - It rewards your brain and changes your brain's wiring in positive ways that to tend toward contentment.</p> <p>http://braintalks.com/news/2013/04/this-is-your-brain-on-mindfulness/ http://palousemindfulness.com/selfguidedMBSR.html https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZlJdtHUsR0</p> <p>APPS - Insight Meditation Timer, Buddhify, Headspace, Zazn Books - Meditation for Beginners by Jack Kornfield; How to Meditate by Pema Chodron; Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D.</p>
3.	<p>Avoid isolation; connect with family and friends - Social connectedness is vitally important. It helps to reduce the effects of stress on brain and body. Good hormones (e.g., oxytocin) are released. See the article above for ways to connect virtually.</p> <p>http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/social-support/art-20044445?pg=2</p>
4.	<p>Exercise - It is good for your body: it helps reduce stress, combats anxiety and depression, and it actually improves cognitive functioning, improves memory, and enhances mood. Good hormones (endorphins) are released - aka "the runner's high." <i>Spark: Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain</i>, John Ratey (2013)</p> <p>http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/exercise-and-stress/art-20044469</p>
5.	<p>Take a fun class - Learn something new, exercise the creative side of your brain; have a scheduled time for your class, prepay for it; e.g., guitar lessons, dog agility class, knitting class, tai chi, toastmasters, poetry writing. Something that is new, different, and that you look forward to --- especially with a friend! Many classes are offered online now.</p> <p>http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2014/11/06/crafting-knitting.aspx http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mental-downtime/</p>

6.	<p>Volunteer – It lowers stress, contributes to a sense of well-being, and improves physical health as well!</p> <p>http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/volunteering-may-be-good-for-body-and-mind-201306266428</p>
7.	<p>Power song – Taking breaks is really important for your brain. You can use listening to a song as a meditation or to pump you up! (Choose “We Will Rock You” not “Who Let the Dogs Out.”) Join a choir. It does awesome things for you!</p> <p>http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/15/health/brain-music-research/ http://www.unr.edu/counseling/virtual-relaxation-room/releasing-stress-through-the-power-of-music http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10496056/Choir-singing-boosts-your-mental-health.html</p>
8.	<p>Humor-break – Breaks are vitally important and if you can combine that with some laughter, you have provided your body and your brain with some much needed feel-good time. Laughing stimulates many organs, activates your stress response, and then relaxes your body systems. Laughing also strengthens your immune system.</p> <p>http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456 http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/pub/feap/work-life/newsletters/Humor%20and%20Stress.pdf</p>
9.	<p>Spirituality, religion, and connecting with nature - Spirituality, organized religion, or just communing with nature can help to foster a sense of meaning and purpose (and offer perspective when you are highly stressed). Being in nature or at least looking out a window at some nature is great for your brain. Light increases serotonin – one of our neurochemicals that helps mood and fights depression. Benefits of being outside: increased attention, focus, and memory; lower stress, and reduced brain fatigue.</p> <p>http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044464</p>
10.	<p>Pets – if you have pets, try to maximize your interactions with them; this increases our feel-good hormones, lowers stress levels, and lowers blood pressure. If you don’t have pets, you can volunteer to walk dogs at the Humane Society or go visit someplace with a fish tank!</p> <p>http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-05-13/dogs-stress-relief-on-campus/54921444/1 http://hyper.ahajournals.org/content/38/4/815.full</p>
11.	<p>Commitment & accountability – We are more likely to do pretty much everything if we have another person we feel accountable to. So, get a gym buddy, a walking or running partner, a meditation buddy, a movie break buddy. You get the point! In the time of social distancing, you may need to partner up from your own homes, but it can still be done. APPS- https://www.stickk.com/</p>

12.	<p>Group/Social Activity – Same idea as above, but this can facilitate social connections. See the article above for ideas on connecting virtually. http://news.wustl.edu/news/Pages/5642.aspx</p>
13.	<p>Intimacy – Healthy intimate relationships can be a huge source of support in high stress times; physical contact with other people (even something as simple as a hug or a pat) releases oxytocin in our brains (that’s good) and reduces stress and anxiety (that’s also good). http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-healthy_u/ci_25048767/power-touch-mdash-intimacy-has-health-benefits-all</p>
14.	<p>Gratitude – It’s good for our well-being to make a practice of appreciation. It is also a state of being that increases our social connections. http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/pdfs/GratitudePDFs/2Wood-GratitudeWell-BeingReview.pdf http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times</p>
15.	<p>Savoring practice – Our brain has a <i>negativity bias</i>. Bad experiences stick in our memories while positive experiences flow through like water through a sieve. You can shift your brain toward positivity by savoring a positive moment for just 10-30 seconds. This attention to the positive cements those moments in our memories just like the negative moments. http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/10_steps_to_savoring_the_good_things_in_life</p>
16.	<p>Diet – Quick Tips: 1) Hunger hurts Concentration → eat breakfast (oatmeal is a natural brain food); 2) Good Foods = Alertness →spinach, broccoli, & beans are great alertness foods; 3) Good Glucose = Good Memory → complex carbs (e.g., green veggies, whole grains, beans, lentils, peas & potatoes) provide steady source of glucose, avoiding sugar spikes. Comfort foods (chips, candy bars, pastries) work ok in the moment, but can cause blood-sugar fluctuations that can increase stress and mood swings. http://www.helpguide.org/articles/diet-weight-loss/emotional-eating.htm http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/healthy-foods-eat-brain-power https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-science-willpower/201111/stress-sugar-and-self-control</p>
17.	<p>Sleep – Sleep deprivation and elevated stress hormones tend to be related. Healthy Tips: Stick to a sleep schedule, develop a relaxing pre-bedtime ritual, exercise daily, avoid alcohol/drugs, tobacco, caffeine, and heavy meals before bedtime; have a bedroom that is cool, quiet, and dark. Sweet Dreams! http://sleepfoundation.org/ http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/tips-reduce-stress; http://consumer.healthday.com/encyclopedia/stress-management-37/stress-health-news-640/sleep-deprivation-and-stress-646063.html</p>

18.	<p>Self-Awareness – Our daily lives are filled with innumerable things, people, obligations, schedules, and responsibilities competing for our attention, many of which are among the normal stresses of a law office environment. Practicing self-awareness simply means stopping and taking time to inwardly reflect on ourselves and what is going on within us in the present moment. For example, are we angry, tired, anxious, fearful, or sad, etc.? When we practice self-awareness, in a compassionate, non-self-blaming way, we are more likely to avoid unwanted stress-induced behaviors and reactions, more likely to regulate our emotions in a healthy way, and more likely to develop an understanding of ourselves and our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Meditation, mindfulness, yoga, journaling, and Tai-Chi are practices that people often use to increase their self-awareness.</p> <p>http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/self-awareness-and-stress-relief/ http://www.turn-stress-into-bliss.com/self-awareness-exercises http://www.thepracticingmind.com/author/chelsea15</p>
19.	<p>Listen to your body -- Do a <i>self-care body scan</i>: check in with yourself. Are you experiencing any aches, pains, or other discomfort? If so, your body may be telling you something like: get some exercise, eat something, cut down on the caffeine, take a time-out, or call a friend? Listen to your body!</p> <p>http://www.mindful.org/the-body-scan-practice/</p>
20.	<p>Structure and schedules – Develop regular daily habits and routines for activities that are repetitive (e.g., going to bed, getting up in morning; work times, meal times, social times, self-care times, zoning out times, etc.). Perhaps even keep a simple log, journal, or calendar to record your success in maintaining your schedule and routine; for some, a visual track record of accomplishments tends to reinforce success.</p> <p>Having a regular daily schedule reduces the need to make minor or routine decisions and choices. This practice: (1) eliminates needless decision-making, preserving the brain’s energy for higher level tasks; (2) creates a sense of control & empowerment; (3) Encourages planning one’s day; (4) Encourages the creation of healthy self-care habits, like exercising and visiting with family and friends.</p> <p>http://www.rebeccaanhalt.com/schedule-more-and-stress-less/</p>
21.	<p>To-Do Lists can be Two-Edged Swords – For some to-do lists are helpful and stress-relieving; for others they are stress-producing. The longer the list, the less likely you are to get things done. If you make a to-do list, keep it simple and relatively short (eliminate low-priority items), and do not jump from one task to another – try to complete one item at a time. If you really like lists, consider including a “done list” at the end of the day to celebrate your accomplishments. All lists of things to do should include one or more healthy self-care activities.</p> <p>http://www.jillkonrath.com/sales-blog/quickly-reduce-your-to-do-list</p>

22.	<p>Avoid relationship drama – If you have personal relationships that are occasionally volatile, respectfully inform the other person that all your energies right now must be focused on your work and self-care and you will not engage in any relationship drama – and stick to this rule. This is called <i>maintaining healthy boundaries!</i></p> <p>http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-twardowski/6-steps-to-setting-boundaries-in-relationships_b_6142248.html</p>
23.	<p>Inspirational reading, dream, imagine, visualize success – Help your brain by doing things that encourage positive thinking.</p> <p>http://www.wisebrain.org/TakingintheGood.pdf</p>
24.	<p>Do something you love – If there is an activity that you enjoy doing right now, make sure you do not lose that as part of your proactive self-care strategy.</p> <p>http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/wellness_articles.asp?id=1657 http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/a_better_way_to_pursue_happiness</p>
25.	<p>Reach out for help: OAAP – If you have questions, concerns, or simply need to talk with someone, call or contact OAAP @ www.oaap.org; 503.226.1057.</p>