

As You Are Taking Care of Business, Are you Taking Care of You?

by Kimberly Rice and Damien Smith, CSCS, CISSN

Is this you? It is no secret that as technology continues to connect us, it also blurs the lines between our professional and personal lives. Smart devices have essentially re-programmed how we interact with and experience the world.

As a result of our work and personal lives melding together, we are challenged to create boundaries that protect our health and well-being.

The daily demands and vast portfolio responsibilities of a legal marketer are weighty and, in too many instances, never ending. I recall in my early days as an in-house legal marketer, it was common for me to work 12 hours or more, on a consistent basis. Being single, without many personal responsibilities and the ambition to grow professionally, I soon learned the unpleasant consequences of the lack of self-care.

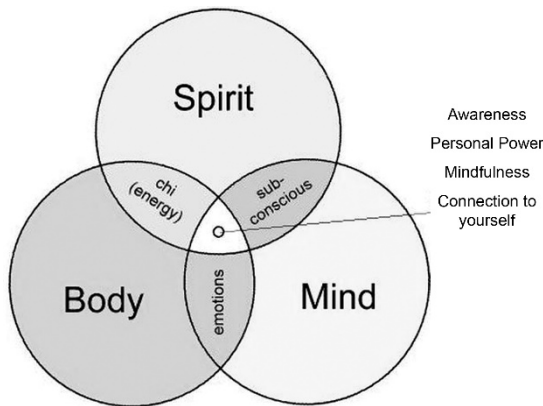
For those of us whom have worked in the law firm environment, we understand clearly the highly charged, rigorous, deadline-driven culture of “more is more”. This way of thinking stands in drastic contrast to a well-balanced body-mind-spirit experience.

How science informs us. According to a recent Gallup study of 7,500 full-time employees, two thirds have experienced burnout to some degree. Burned out employees take more sick days, are more likely to look actively for a new position, have low confidence in their own performance and probably won't ask for help. The price of burnout isn't paid only at the workplace. Many of those who say they consistently experience high levels of burnout and anxiety are prone to believe it negatively impacts their personal lives.

Not surprisingly, the effects of burnout don't stop at the office door. Employees who consistently experience high levels of burnout are two times more likely to agree strongly that the amount of time they devote to their job creates severe challenges to fulfill their family responsibilities. Even scarier, burned-out employees are 23% more likely to visit the emergency room and carry around a heavy feeling of self-doubt and lack.

Wellness and mind-body practices gain more attention. As we struggle to “do it all”, how much does our health suffer? What are our daily practices to protect ourselves, body and mind? According to a study commissioned by the National Institutes of Health, individuals whom engaged in a three-month yoga and meditation retreat were assessed before and after for psychometric measures.

Participation in the retreat was found to be associated with a decrease in self-reported anxiety and depression as well as increases in mindfulness, which is interpreted by some to be too “woo woo”. The practice of mindfulness is as simple as maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens.



Don't we all need and deserve that level of kindness for ourselves, especially the super women professionals in law firms today whom keep countless balls juggling successfully, go home to take care of their families and then jump back onto their laptops for more work. You know who you are!

Evidence from previous studies of the positive effects of meditative practices on mental fitness, autonomic self-regulation and inflammatory status (less cortisol released throughout the body) are believed to be related to the meditative practices throughout the retreat.

Workplace wellness programs just makes sense. With our country's soaring health care costs, employers are expressing growing interest in methods of improving health while lowering costs. There is growing evidence that workplace wellness programs lead to reductions in health care costs and thus health insurance premiums. Second, healthier employees might be more productive and miss fewer days of work.

Hit the Pause Button. The skills, intuition and awareness that we possess in our profession did not come by way of reading volumes of literature, taking numerous courses at a specialized school, or moreover, when we earned a certain degree.

Though the preceding are foundations of learning, the acumen we possess was developed through an organic time-taking growth process. Our vision, faith, grit and support from family, friends and work associates have been tools to support that growth. In fact, building anything of substance and longevity requires this same process and nurturing environment.

Often enough in our personal quest to achieve "success", we lose a specific internal acumen that is fundamental to our connection to nature, and with that we degrade our ability to self-regulate (control of emotions, hormones, concentration, health, joy...etc.). With progressive steps and persistent practice, we can achieve a powerful ability to decrease anxiety, increase joy and fulfillment, increase performance capabilities, enhance desire/vitality, produce a more mindful state and much more, in and out of the workplace. At the root of all these attributes is self-regulation, and the journey toward it is at hand.

Where to begin?

Learning to breathe all over again. At the fundamentals of health, well-being, healing and human performance, there lies the simple yet powerful effects of the breath. With proper instruction, consistent and persistent practice, specific breathing techniques will have a tremendous impact on decreasing inflammation throughout the body, enhancing brain power, balancing emotions and correcting hormonal imbalances. This practice is supported by a myriad of current and past research going as far back as the 1970s.

According to research published in *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, those who sharpen this internal tool will begin to achieve deeper sleep, improve digestive issues and feel that they are staying "in the zone" more often, while resisting "thought clutter".

Further, specific breathing practices will enrich the connection to yourself (self-awareness, self-esteem...etc.) as well as deepen your connection to a powerful reserve of energy within you that will support a higher level of health, healing, wellness and performance in all areas of your life. This information is based upon over 5,000 years of study, observation and rich tradition of specific eastern-based self-regulatory methodology.

A visual of the body-mind-spirit connection. (www.forcefitnessandnutrition.com/body-mind-spirit)

Self talk. On a daily basis, we are constantly speaking (consciously or subconsciously) with ourselves and affirming information about ourselves or our circumstances, over and over again. So, the question becomes what messages are we sending to ourselves? Are they positive or negative? Are they liberating or inhibiting? If you speak emotionally-charged messages to yourself enough times, they will eventually become strong beliefs. These beliefs translate into a powerful feeling, a feeling that cultivates action (or in-action). The action we take on a consistent basis manifests our destiny.

With that in mind, let's spend time super charging ourselves by creating and repeating affirmations that propel us towards the things we desire.

After a round of a breathing exercise, you may notice a feeling of being zeroed in, or being "in the zone", and this is the best time to begin focusing on positive thoughts such as "I am a successful professional who is content in my circumstances" or other such uplifting affirmative messages. The effectiveness of this process is not just about what you say, but also with how much intention you use and how much emotion you evoke.

Five minutes of emotionally-driven affirmations (see video blog) 3. See it and achieve it.

After speaking your affirmations, you may feel energized. This is a productive way to begin a visualization exercise. Sit or lay back, relax and begin to envision your productive day.

Visualize the smiles on other's faces, feel the joy of achieving a challenging goal. Once you feel the joy and power internally, you'll know you are visualizing effectively. To attain this internal energy and wellness requires practice. Once you persist, the magic will happen over time.

Attitude of gratitude. Finally, spend a few moments being grateful each day for all of the things your life, your connection to family and friends, your health and anything else that comes to mind. Concentrate and feel it. This one is easy, though extremely powerful.

Develop New Habits. The process of developing new habits is easier when you take pleasure in the activities. What is the 'payoff'? Do you feel better, more energized and at peace following your wellness exercises? That's the objective, after all.

Moreover, you are likely to maintain a rhythm and commitment to new habits, especially if whatever pains you is relieved.

Taking small, simple steps every day and even during the day is the most direct path to increase overall wellness. Twenty minutes of practice daily is all that is required to begin or continue on your path to health, healing and wellness.

An important aspect of developing a new daily practice that helps build persistence is feeling and seeing progress. Practice feeds progress and progress feeds practice. As your skill increases, there are new levels to work on, depending upon your personal goals. The journey continues.

A cautionary word about quality practice - when you begin to feel more peace, less stress and increased internal power, there is a tendency to become complacent: adherence to practice is imperative lest a steady backslide into old habits results.

A simple question to provide perspective: “How many more days must you brush your teeth for them to stay healthy?”

A Final Note on Building Balance. We all desire to move forward and achieve more in and out of the workplace. Ideally, we would prefer the ride to be smooth and joyful.

If we consider our life as a cartwheel, consider MBS work (Mind, Body, Spirit), our innate personality and our personal faith/belief at the hub. These are our foundation, the core of who we are. When the foundation is strong, it is more readily available to support the spokes of our life.

The spokes are the practices we use to nurture and develop ourselves, such as specific professional skill development, nutritional habits (sleep is included), physical exercise, self-regulation, reading, education and more.

All of these spokes are important for functioning and feeling well within ourselves. When these spokes are strong and in balance, they can more readily support the wheel.

In this case, the inside portion of the wheel is all about the joy and happiness, grace, emotional intelligence, gratitude, self-esteem and self-awareness that we have accumulated. The outer part of the wheel is about functioning, interacting and doing well outside ourselves. Healthy relationships, family life, work performance and community outreach, just to name a few things.

There will always be bumps in the road, however, by strengthening ourselves from the inside out, we can more easily keep moving forward towards greater joy and satisfaction, day-to-day. That, in itself, is a journey worth taking.

***Damien Smith**, Founder of Force Fitness & Nutrition, has nearly 20 years of focused experience and education in exercise science and nutrition. He provides a comprehensive approach to health, fitness and performance training needs. Damien may be reached via forcefitnessandnutrition.com.*

***Kimberly Rice**, editor-in-chief of this publication is President/Chief Strategist of KLA Marketing Associates (klamarketing.com), a legal business development advisory firm. She is author of [Rainmaker Road: A Step-by-Step Guide to Building a Prosperous Business](#) and may be reached at klamarketing.com.*