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12 Programs Law Firms Can Implement To Enhance Employee Wellness

"Self-care? Are you kidding? I have to work as much as humanly possible."

By JEENA CHO

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I was invited by the South Carolina bar to do a presentation on mindfulness and the importance of caring for our own well-being last week. It gives me so much hope to see bar associations starting to recognize that rest, relaxation, and downtime is essential for good lawyering.

Sometimes, when I talk about self-care to a group of lawyers, I get puzzled looks. The attitude seems to be, *Self-care? Are you kidding? I have to work as much as humanly possible.*

Let's begin by defining [self-care](#):

“ Self-care refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to **reduce stress and maintain and enhance our short- and longer-term health and well-being.**

To use an easy example for illustration purpose, consider this statement: *It's difficult for me to do my best work when I feel fatigued.*

I don't think there would be much to quibble about. The truism of that statement is obvious.

Yet, when I suggest basic self-care practices such as getting enough sleep, having down time, exercise, and eating a well balanced diet, I'll often get pushback. *I don't have time to go to the gym! I have so much work to do. I can't afford more sleep! I have to bill more hours. Sit quietly every day and meditate?!?!?!?*

I don't doubt you have a lot of work, that your work is important, your clients depend on you, and so does your boss. However, taking time to practice self-care doesn't diminish your ability to do your best work. To the contrary, it's **essential** for doing your best work.

You know this to be true, right? Consider the last time you pulled an all nighter. Were you functioning at your peak the next day? Doubtful.

Of course, there are circumstances where while not ideal, you have to put in long hours. BUT, it's important to take time to practice self-care once the event that caused the long hours passes.

This is the stress management 101 — structure your life such that there are outlets to let go of stress on a regular and consistent basis.

Law firms can also play a role in getting the absolute best work from its lawyers (and staff) by making self-care and wellness a priority.

In one of the workshops I attended at the South Carolina bar's annual convention, an attorney, Mike Ethridge, partner at [Carlock Copeland](#) offered the following wellness practices for law firms. Mike also writes a blog called [Lawyers In Search of a Soul](#) that I recommend you check out.

Practices For Creating a Healthier Law Firm Culture

1. Have walking meetings. (Check out this [TED talk](#) by Nilofer Merchant on how this works.)
2. Host monthly potluck get togethers. Offer childcare to make it easier for people to attend.
3. Have a Stress Free Zone room. Encourage everyone to spend 15 minutes per day to recharge and destress.
4. Recognize and praise employees that demonstrate a well developed balance between working hard and taking time for family and self-care.
5. Start a mentorship program.
6. Start a monthly wellness challenge. Some ideas: daily meditation, drink more water, or have a goal of taking certain number of daily steps.
7. Celebrate your employees' work anniversaries with a day off.
8. Host workshops or "lunch and learn" sessions on health issues. Invite experts from the community. For example, have a dietician speak about healthy cooking.
9. Partner with local college and offer discounted education.
10. Offer a standing desk.
11. Host an art participation night. (Creativity is essential for good lawyering!)
12. Offer flex-time.

Many of these suggestions can be implemented bottom-up as well. Remember, you are responsible for your well-being!

Why is Self-Care So Hard?

Sadly, one of the most common obstacles for adopting healthier habits or taking time for self-care is **guilt**. We live in a world of 24/7 connection and there's an expectation that we constantly produce, that we're constantly in *doing* mode.

It's worthwhile spending time to see the narrative behind the guilt. For example, you *know* you *should* exercise, therefore you decide you're going to go to yoga three times a week. You're getting ready to head to your yoga class and something comes up. An email, call, or something else that requires your attention.

You might notice, how quickly are you to abandon your plan for yoga? How quickly are you to concede and put other people's needs before your own? Are you conceding because it's truly urgent (meaning, it truly cannot wait 60 minutes) *or* are you conceding because you don't want to say "no?" Are you somehow engaging in self-sabotage?

I'm not telling you to be dogmatic but rather to take a closer look at your habits. Take a look at the obstacles — both external and internal that prevents you from practicing self-care.

Finally, I'll leave you with another truism: *Secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others.*



Jeena Cho is the author of [The Anxious Lawyer: An 8-Week Guide to a Joyful and Satisfying Law Practice Through Mindfulness and Meditation](#) (affiliate link). She regularly speaks and offers training on mindfulness and meditation. You can reach her at hello@jeenacho.com or [@jeena_cho](#) on Twitter.



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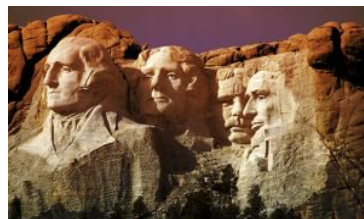
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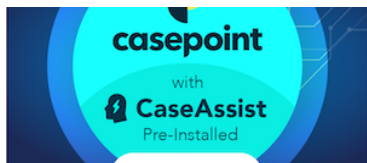


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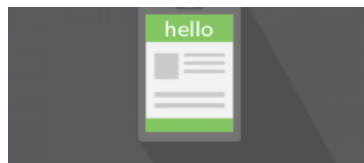
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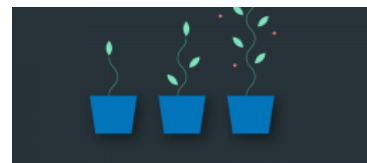
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