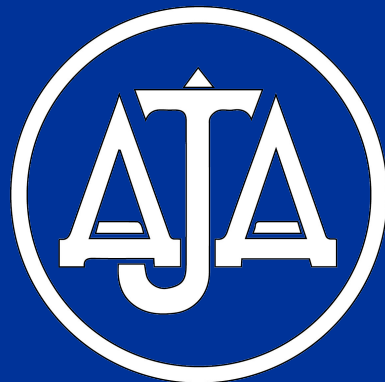


Self Care is Not Selfish: The Importance of Judicial Wellbeing

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Learning Objectives

After this session you will be better able to:

- **Identify** triggers that commonly cause stress;
- **Apply** techniques and utilize outlets designed to deal with stress and uneasiness; and
- **Assist** colleagues in coping with challenging and overwhelming situations.

You Know You're Stressed When.....

- **Antacid** tablets become your sole source of nutrition
- **You** say the same sentence over and over again, never realizing you have said it before.
- **You** wonder if brewing is a necessary step in coffee consumption
- **You** discover the aesthetic beauty of office supplies
- **You** insist that curse words are no more than “sentence enhancers”
- **You** can't decide if you need a hug, six shots of Vodka or three months of sleep.

Instant Recall

Take 2 minutes to recall a case you handled or participated in. This should be a fairly vivid memory. It does not matter the role you played or how long ago it happened. Why do you remember this case? Why do you recall this experience? What about it still “sticks” with you?

Combatting Mind Fatigue

- **Stress** and Vicarious Trauma (distress associated with working directly with traumatized people) are frequently discussed as problems facing frontline workers (EMT, law enforcement, social workers), but rarely in relation to judges.
- **Judges** frequently experience the effects of trauma including re-experiencing, avoidance, numbing and persistent arousal as a result of vicarious trauma. This is frequently a lonely, isolated and consistent feeling.
- **When surveyed**, judges reported symptoms of emotional distress, interpersonal problems, physical and cognitive symptoms, actual mental health diagnoses, as well as being less likely to share concerns with colleagues for fear of appearing “weak and “vulnerable.”

Mindfulness vs. Mindlessness

Harvard Psychologist Ellen Langer and author Jon Kabat-Zinn have worked for decades perfecting the understanding of Mindfulness.

“The awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.”

Requires full engagement in what is going on but not being overly reactive.

Mindfulness vs. Mindlessness

Sometimes the best way to understand mindfulness is in the context of “mindlessness”

- **Driving** and you suddenly realize you have no recollection of the last five miles.
- **Frantically** looking for your eyeglasses only to realize that they are resting above your forehead
- **The waiter** who repeats the “daily specials” by rote but doesn’t seem to hear your question about the menu.

Mindfulness vs. Mindlessness

Taking in, processing and appreciating information is monumentally important.

- **Research** suggests that mind wandering (have “off-task thoughts during on-task activity) comprises as much as 50% of waking life.
- **Mind** wandering dampens the sensory input, sours mood, and increases errors in judgment including the task at hand.
- **Stress** can increase the frequency of mind wandering
- **Under** stress, working memory capacity is reduced so that less information can be kept in mind.

What Do You Do?

You are presiding over a lengthy trial. The evidence is technical in nature and the presentation by the attorneys is tedious (at best) in large part because the law is complex. You find that from time to time, you've missed parts of the evidence presentation because your mind is wandering. This is becoming stressful because you know that in the end, you must have a command of both the evidence and the law to make a ruling. Making things worse is the fact that the hearing is taking longer than you had expected. You find yourself becoming more distracted as you worry about how the rest of your schedule will be affected. What do you do?

Practice S.T.O.P.

A Short but simple mindfulness technique that may be helpful when noticing your mind wandering or agitation setting in.

See: “The Inner Game of Stress” by Timothy Gallwey (2009)

- **S:** Stop, step back notice what’s happening and put some distance between yourself and the situation.
- **T:** Take a breath. Take a few breaths if needed. Consider the truth of the situation, what’s going on, your feelings, priorities and options.
- **O:** Observe. Organize your thoughts. Come up with an action plan.
- **P:** Proceed. Move forward with your work with new clarity and understanding.

We All Need Rules

Tackling judicial stressors requires setting realistic parameters on how we address and resolve the pressures of our work:

- **Develop**, nurture and maintain healthy outlets outside of work (gardening, book clubs, meditation, volunteer, exercise, etc.)
- **Establish** a 30, 60 or 90-day rule
- **Help** create a judicial support program for colleagues
- **Talk, Talk, Talk** (therapy is not a sign of weakness or vulnerability)
- **Use Technology**, apps and systems are helpful (Calm, Alexa, Google)

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Questions

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