

The Law is a Jealous Mistress¹

By Tish Vincent

Whether we judge the causes of stress and imbalance to be “good” or “bad,” we are well-advised to act in a thoughtful manner in dealing with the stressors in our lives. Proper nutrition, restful sleep, regular exercise, flexible time management, allowing for “quiet time,” and other practices...keep the stressors at a healthy level.²

Through all the seasons of a lawyer’s career, these admonitions remain. We may be a freshly minted attorney having recently passed the bar exam, a mid-career attorney toiling to keep our business active, or a newly retired attorney deciding whether to keep our license current “just in case.”

The personality traits that drew us to the practice of law sometimes stand in the way of our self-care and stress management. Can we engineer a life without stress? Absolutely not. No one can. Can we remember that we are human beings who need what every human being needs regardless of career, relationship status, or bank account? We do not abandon our need for sleep, nutritious meals, emotional support, or financial security when we raise our hands and swear our oaths as attorneys.

Lawyers often have a passion for representing others, yet somehow dismiss their

own needs. How many times does it bear repeating that caregivers (lawyers are vigorous caregivers) must put on their own oxygen masks before helping their clients position theirs? We cannot give to others what we are not giving to ourselves.

And yet, the practice of law often requires us to burn the candle at both ends, to be heroic in our efforts, and make extra time appear from thin air. How do we bring balance back into the picture once the crush of a deadline, trial, or huge case has passed? Sometimes life events demand the same sacrifice—the death of a loved one, divorce, a child’s serious illness, or another catastrophe.

After surviving a stressful period or event, people need downtime. They need days or weeks to rest and unwind. These downtimes may result in the emergence of strong emotions. This is beneficial; these emotions are a part of us and need to be felt.

As time passes and we begin to feel rested and calm, we can return to simple self-care routines. Therapists advise individuals who are struggling with serious depression to spend 15 minutes each day doing housework, exercising, engaging in a hobby, and speaking to someone else who simply listens and understands them.

This formula is meant to offer structure to a person who is feeling overwhelmed. There is no more detail to these instructions. It takes an hour a day, and the benefits are many.

Let’s call it self-care in a nutshell. ■



Tish Vincent, MSW, JD, LMSW, ACSW, CAADC is a licensed clinical social worker with expertise in the treatment of substance use and mental health disorders. She is also a licensed attorney with experience in health law and alternative dispute resolution. Vincent is the program administrator for the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program.

ENDNOTES

1. “The law is a jealous mistress and requires long and constant courtship. It is not to be won by trifling favors, but by lavish homage.” Statement made in 1929 by United States Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story.
2. Coffey & Kessler, *The Reflective Counselor: Daily Meditations for Lawyers* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 2008), p 204.



community service

access to justice

pro bono

