

Plate #3: Keep a Healthy “Rotation”

By AMANDA G. SCHREIBER

There is a symbiotic relationship between work and the rest of your life. If you eat well, exercise, get adequate sleep, and develop overall healthy habits there will be a natural benefit to your career. It is an all too easy to understand concept that few young lawyers, or lawyers of any age, have mastered.

My column this year has explored the juggling act of the present-day young lawyer. I started the year opining that a young lawyer’s life often feels like a plate spinning act at the circus—one individual desperately juggling, trying to keep those delicate plates twirling in the air. To date, I have explored the work and family plates, and the obstacles to keeping those metaphorical plates spinning.

However, the most neglected plate for most young lawyers is the health and wellbeing plate. Of all the plates in a young lawyer’s life it is the one most likely to fall, crashing down and shattering to pieces.

It’s no surprise. After all, lawyers work in a career prone to unhealthy habits and toxic levels of stress. With the advent of new technology, our jobs have become sedentary. We sit gazing at a laptop screen for extended periods of time, repeating the same movements over and over (hopefully not reaching for that tin of leftover holiday candy). Worse yet, for all the satisfaction that comes from working in a career defending fairness and justice, our day-to-day is fraught with a high consequence of error, unpleasant and angry people, focus on pre-

Amanda G. Schreiber is the chair of the Connecticut Bar Association Young Lawyers Section for the 2019-2020 bar year. She is associate senior counsel at Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company in Bloomfield, where she handles healthcare litigation specializing in ERISA and MHPAEA. She graduated with honors from Quinnipiac University School of Law in 2011.



cision, deadline-driven burdens on time, and generally long work days (noted as I write this article at midnight).

So why don’t we do better for ourselves?

I don’t think this plate is neglected because lawyers do not comprehend the importance of self-care. It’s because stress stems from a lack of resources to accomplish goals, and in the prioritizing process we tend to put ourselves last. As a class we are a stressed out, overextended bunch. If it is not an immediate concern, it does not get addressed as a priority.

This simply cannot be for lawyers of any age. But to my young lawyer colleagues, I offer this advice: you must understand that there is a puberty to your career, including an awkward and prolonged period of growth. A successful legal career requires years of learning the craft, networking, and building a practice—it doesn’t happen overnight. A part of that journey must include a focus on your own health and wellbeing. To have a long and prosperous legal career, you’ll

need to keep your mind sharp. Further, you’ll want to maintain sound health so you can best enjoy the fruits of your hard labor and are better equipped to withstand the obstacles life in the law will throw your way.

Although I have surely not mastered this balancing act myself, colleagues offer advice on how best to keep the metaphorical health and wellbeing plate in rotation. Working in a daily break or routine is a simple way to maintain health and wellbeing no matter how busy the day. After all, there is a reason major fitness companies remind you to stand up and take 200 steps an hour.

“I fill the fridge with healthy foods and try to eat throughout the day,” says Johanna Katz, Appellate Practice co-chair of the Young Lawyers Section and associate at Pullman & Comley LLC. “Finding time to exercise is much harder though. I find if I can go to the gym I get a boost of energy, but that’s not an option some days. On those days I’ll do squats or push-ups against the counter while microwaving lunch or waiting



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for my coffee to brew. Finding just one minute of exercise here and there makes a difference.”

On those days you can take more significant time to yourself, colleagues recommend finding an activity that provides an emotional reset. Too often lawyers push themselves to the breaking point. To better serve yourself and your long-term career, become adept at identify-

ing that point and provide yourself the much needed, head-clearing break. “Get out,” says Jonathan Friedler, non-CLE director of the Young Lawyers Section and associate at Geraghty & Bonnano LLC. “I like hiking, it’s therapy for me. The physical health aspect speaks for itself, but it also clears my mind. Nothing feels better than accomplishing your task and there’s nothing like being at the top of the mountain.”

It is my hope that this column ignites conversation among lawyers of all ages as to the importance of the health and wellbeing plate and the need to maintain a focused eye on it. Use your career and its challenges not as a detriment, but as inspiration and motivation to live the life you want to live—happier and healthier. ■

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