

Law School's Missed Lessons: Practicing Self-Care

By **Rachel Leonard** (July 9, 2025)

While law school teaches everything from civil procedure to stare decisis, there are some aspects of practicing law that aren't covered during the three years that lead up to the bar exam. In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys offer advice on navigating real-world aspects of legal practice that are often overlooked in law school. If there is a professional skill you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

Throughout law school we learned about torts, contracts, property, constitutional law, corporations and various other topics to prepare us for the bar exam, but no course or professor ever taught us how to take care of ourselves.

Our well-being often takes a back seat to hard work. The legal profession demands long and arduous hours, attention to detail, critical thinking and the ability to put your emotions aside, regardless of your area of practice — at all times. But how do we cope as attorneys when we are emotionally and mentally exhausted? How do we recognize that we need to take better care of ourselves? What tools should we use to prevent burnout?



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Self-care is one of the most important but least practiced life skills. As attorneys, we are judged based on our ability to quickly and expertly deliver an amazing work product regardless of the stress and strain on our minds and bodies. The legal field includes many stress-inducing attributes: hard and fast deadlines, an adversarial process that is often overly aggressive, clients seeking answers and information, and an environment that rewards high billable hours and increased work output.

A 2024 attorney well-being survey by Bloomberg Law found attorneys reported several concerning patterns. Among other well-being issues, 56% of the attorneys surveyed reported disrupted sleep, 55% reported anxiety, and 44% reported low levels of energy and concentration.

This same study addressed instances of burnout and found that attorneys 25 to 34 years old reported feeling burnout an average of 58% of the time in the last half of 2023. This percentage decreased with increases in age, with instances of burnout reported an average of 52% of the time for attorneys ages 35 to 44, 49% for ages 45 to 54, 48% for ages 55 to 64, and 23% for ages 65 and over.

These statistics must change. Taking care of your mental, physical and emotional health is not a sign of weakness, it is actually a sign of strength because you understand what is necessary to ensure you attend to your well-being. A strong mind and body will ensure success in your endeavors. Developing a routine and habits to protect yourself can help to ensure more focus, better stress management and less chance of burnout.

Setting boundaries is an excellent way to take care of yourself, especially in the world of remote or hybrid work schedules. Create separate spaces for your work life and your

personal life so that you can shut down work when it's done and focus on yourself, your family, your pets, your friends and anything else that brings you joy.

Sometimes it's the little things that have the biggest impact. Self-care does not necessarily mean a spa day or relinquishing your responsibilities. It is all well and good to say that self-care is important, but actually making it a priority is an entirely different story. Below are several helpful strategies for self-care.

Schedule time in your day for a short break.

You'll might be amazed at how helpful a five-minute meditation or some deep breathing can be as a way to center yourself. Chair yoga is another simple option that can help to reset your body and mind. Also, it's almost always a good idea to take a break from sitting at your desk with a short walk.

These simple, yet effective strategies are small examples of self-care and ways to reset your brain so you can dive back into work.

Ask for help when you need it.

Seeking assistance is not a sign of weakness, in fact, it is a sign of strength. Various bar associations offer lawyer assistance programs with confidential mental health and substance abuse support programs. If you need them, use them. There is no shame in asking for help.

Additionally, therapy can help us to manage our stress levels, cope with difficult emotions and situations, and improve communication.

Get plenty of exercise and rest.

Adding a regular exercise routine to your schedule can not only improve your physical health, but also your mental health. Exercise helps reduce stress and anxiety and triggers the release of endorphins. Further, group exercise classes can foster social connections, which can also help to reduce stress.

Set boundaries and keep them.

Delegate tasks as you are able. If you have a paralegal or other attorneys on your team who can assist, ask for help. Most importantly, if an environment is truly toxic, avoid it. There is no shame in recognizing that a particular job is not right for you and moving on.

Conclusion

What happens when we do not take care of our minds and bodies? Why is self-care so important? The demands of our profession are intense. High-stress situations can lead to chronic stress, physical and mental exhaustion, deterioration of our personal relationships, illness, depression, and various other issues.

Developing a self-care practice early on in your career to ensure your own well-being is crucial to your success as an attorney. Any stigma attached to self-care is rapidly diminishing. Self-care is not selfish or lazy, and practicing self-care does not make you less reliable. Rather, the opposite is true. Self-care will likely result in increased energy levels, improved focus, and better time- and stress-management abilities.

In a profession where so much value is placed on how many hours we bill and how hard we work, we are taught to merely survive when we actually need to thrive. We often face fear or guilt when we take a moment for ourselves, but self-care is an investment in our well-being, not something to be frowned upon.

As attorneys, if we take care of ourselves, we will better serve our clients and our co-workers, we will treat our families and friends better, we will have the time and energy to approach our adversaries with respect, our decorum will be upheld, and our successes will continue to grow.

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