

Mindful Lawyer

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THE ART OF RESTING:
HOW TO FIT RELAXATION
INTO A BUSY SCHEDULE

LEARN TO QUIET THE INNER
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THE ART OF RESTING

How to fit relaxation into a busy schedule

SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES

Movement. The word *exercise* is associated with specific activities, such as going to the gym. Broaden your definition to include any activities that involve moving the body. Find movement that feels good. Be flexible. One day, your movement practice might be an hour at the gym; the next day, it might be playing with your kids in the park.

Creativity and hobbies. Do an activity simply for the fun of it. Think back to your childhood and see whether there are activities you used to enjoy that have fallen by the wayside.

Journaling and writing. Writing is an excellent way to process held feelings, explore your inner world and tap into your creativity. One of my favorite practices is described as Morning Pages on the Julia Cameron Live/the Artist's Way website. You simply sit down each morning with a pen and paper to write whatever comes to mind.

Mindful eating. There is no shortage of diet tips and what you should (or shouldn't) eat. However, how you eat is as important as what you eat. Simply described, mindful eating means paying attention while you are eating. If you regularly eat mindlessly, shoving food into your mouth while doing email, only to look down and realize your plate is empty, consider making small adjustments to how you eat. Look at the food—all the colors, the flavors, the smells. Savor the experience.

AN ELUSIVE STATE

There's no off button for the brain. You can go for a massage or sit down to read for pleasure, but the mind may not immediately go into rest mode. It's natural for the mind to race, think about a case and wonder whether you sent that email.

Trying to force the mind to stop thinking is as effective as holding down a beach ball in the ocean. It takes a lot of effort, and sooner or later it will pop back up. Rather, frame it as an invitation for the mind and body to rest. Your mind or body may have other plans, but you're still doing your part by creating an optimal state for rest.

You can go on a weeklong vacation to Hawaii, sit on the beach and sip your favorite beverage, yet your mind may still be back at the office, working frantically. These moments can be very frustrating. Part of learning how to rest is increasing self-knowledge about how your mind works. Rather than criticize yourself for feeling anxious, invite the anxiety to sit down for tea.

Finally, if you're struggling to overcome guilt or negative self-talk about taking time to rest, remember: You cannot serve from an empty vessel.





MINDFULNESS PRACTICE (IN JUST 6 MINUTES)

Here's how to let go of stress and anxiety: Begin by finding a comfortable posture, allowing the eyes to soften and taking a moment to congratulate yourself for being here. It's helpful to work through stress and anxiety not by thinking about the content but rather noticing where in the body you're holding the stress or anxiety.

Do a body scan. Starting with the head, move the attention slowly—down the neck, shoulders and torso, and notice whether there is any tightening or tension. Move down the arms and hands, then into the lower body—the hips, then the legs. Feel your feet on the floor.

Take a nice, long breath. Make it the longest breath you've taken all day.

If you notice the mind going into thinking or worrying mode, recognize that in this moment there is nothing to do except simply be here.

With each inhalation, you're drawing in fresh energy. With each exhalation, you're releasing and letting go of anything you no longer need.

Close the practice by beginning to wiggle the fingers and toes and very gently moving your body in any way that feels good to you. When you feel ready, allow the eyes to open. *(You can hear an audio version of this guided meditation at jeenacho.com/wellbeing.)* ■

LEARN TO QUIET THE INNER CRITIC AND ITS IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS



Photograph of Jeena Cho courtesy of the JC Law Group

Each of us has a critical inner voice—the inner critic. The inner critic pushes us to be perfect, to meet an impossible standard. Rarely does our performance match the ideal perfect standards demanded by the inner critic.

When I reflect back, so much of my life has been governed by the inner critic. I had to prove I was worthy of belonging and love. I had to prove I wasn't a failure. Yet no matter how much I achieved, the inner critic was never satisfied. I didn't know how to pause, to savor, to appreciate the small and big accomplishments of my life.

I remember having overwhelming anxiety at my law school graduation ceremony because I didn't know for certain where I'd work. "You're such a loser. Graduating from law school and without a job," the inner critic chided.

The voice of the inner critic is often not based in fact or reality. Yet the voices can be very compelling. In cognitive behavioral therapy, these thoughts are known as thinking errors or distorted thinking. Learning about these common thought patterns and working with them has been hugely helpful in reducing stress, anxiety and depression.

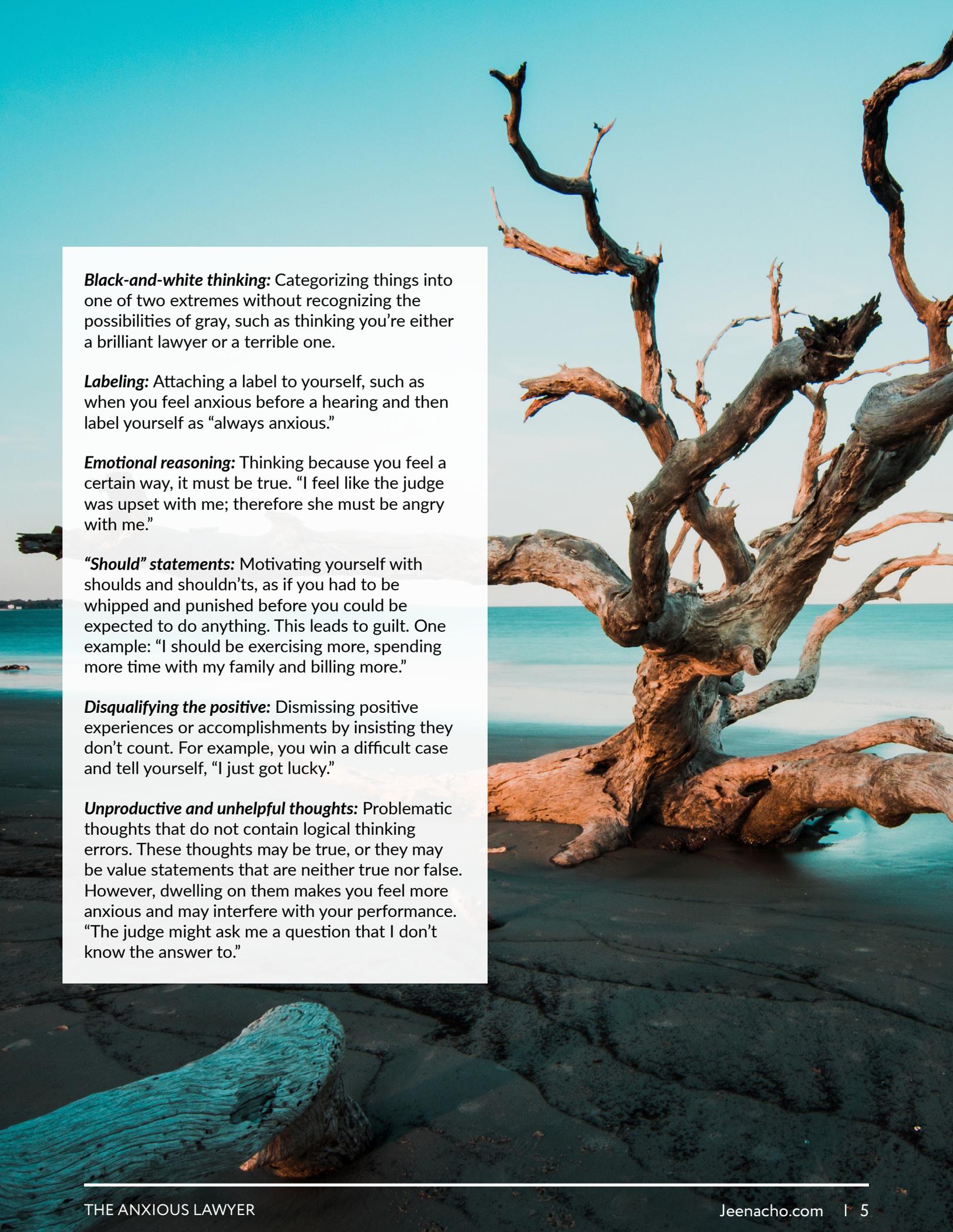
Here are some of the most common thinking errors, adapted from a document from the College of Charleston's counseling and substance abuse services:

Catastrophizing: Imagining the worst-case scenario and blowing it out of proportion. For example, thinking if you don't land this client, you'll never make partner, and then you'll live an unhappy and dissatisfied life.

Jumping to conclusions: Making a judgment without evidence to verify the conclusion, such as thinking the opposing counsel is refusing to stipulate to an extension just to be difficult.

Personalization: Attributing an external event to yourself without causal relationship. For example, your partner seems distracted, and you assume it's because she is angry with you.

Overgeneralization: Generalizing based on a few limited occurrences, such as thinking you gave a terrible presentation because of the few negative feedback comments while ignoring the dozens of positive comments and praise.

A large, gnarled piece of driftwood is the central focus, resting on a dark, wet beach. The wood is weathered and twisted, with many branches extending upwards and outwards. In the background, the ocean is visible under a clear, light blue sky. The overall scene is serene and natural.

Black-and-white thinking: Categorizing things into one of two extremes without recognizing the possibilities of gray, such as thinking you're either a brilliant lawyer or a terrible one.

Labeling: Attaching a label to yourself, such as when you feel anxious before a hearing and then label yourself as "always anxious."

Emotional reasoning: Thinking because you feel a certain way, it must be true. "I feel like the judge was upset with me; therefore she must be angry with me."

"Should" statements: Motivating yourself with shoulds and shouldn'ts, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. This leads to guilt. One example: "I should be exercising more, spending more time with my family and billing more."

Disqualifying the positive: Dismissing positive experiences or accomplishments by insisting they don't count. For example, you win a difficult case and tell yourself, "I just got lucky."

Unproductive and unhelpful thoughts: Problematic thoughts that do not contain logical thinking errors. These thoughts may be true, or they may be value statements that are neither true nor false. However, dwelling on them makes you feel more anxious and may interfere with your performance. "The judge might ask me a question that I don't know the answer to."

WORKING WITH THE INNER CRITIC

By starting to recognize and naming these thought patterns, we can begin to work with the inner critic. Also, we can engage in deliberate practices to relax the thinking mind and see thoughts for what they are—simply a passing mental phenomenon.

In cognitive behavioral therapy, you learn to challenge thoughts. Think of it like putting the inner critic on the witness stand and cross-examining it. How do you know that thought is true? What evidence do you have that the thought is true? What if the opposite were true? Is there another interpretation of the situation?

Having a hobby is also a wonderful way to rewire the brain. Hobbies can be a way of unplugging from the demands of work, engaging your creativity and finding calm. We can use hobbies as a way to examine the inner narrative

Lauren Rad, a lawyer at Ferguson Case Orr Paterson in Ventura, California, who learned to knit as a 1L at Harvard Law School just as final exams approached, says, “Learning to knit, making mistakes while knitting and fixing those mistakes is a way to learn that mistakes in other areas of life are usually fixable, too.

“As you become more comfortable making and fixing mistakes, the inner critic is less able to convince you that you’re stupid for making one, or that a single mistake is the end of the world because you know from experience that’s not true.”

TRY THIS EXERCISE IN SELF-COMPASSION MEDITATION

1. Find a comfortable seated position. Close your eyes.
2. Take some deep breaths, breathing in and out through the nose.
3. Bring to mind someone you care about.
4. Notice how it feels to think of this person.
5. Repeat the following phrases quietly in your mind:
 - ▶ *May I be happy.*
 - ▶ *May I be healthy.*
 - ▶ *May I know ease and joy.*
 - ▶ *May I be free from suffering.*
6. Continue to repeat these phrases while thinking of this person who has unconditional regard for you.
7. When you’re ready, open your eyes.

MINDFULNESS MATTERS

Through mindfulness practice, we can learn to take a friendlier stance toward ourselves. We also can see that these thoughts are just old mental conditioning, and we can start to see patterns: When X happens, I always think Y. When A happens, I always do B. This way of understanding ourselves and our thoughts can be sanity preserving.

You can hear an audio version of this meditation at jeenacho.com/wellbeing. ■

HOW TO FIT RELAXATION INTO A BUSY SCHEDULE

In 2011, I was diagnosed with social anxiety disorder. In hindsight, this result was foreseeable: My boyfriend and I decided to start a bankruptcy practice in 2009 in the midst of the financial crisis. We were both working around the clock. I never thought about sustainability, creating a law practice where there is time not only to work but to renew, restore and rejuvenate.

When we got married, the honeymoon was the only vacation we'd had in over three years. I recall sitting on the porch of a beautiful house in Kauai with nothing to do and full of anxiety. I had no idea how to rest.

Returning to wholeness meant adding consistent and intentional habits to pay attention to my own well-being. I learned to guard myself from unintended consequences of lawyering, such as burnout, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue. I was able to tap into my natural sense of curiosity and creativity, which led to surprising insights and different ways of seeing challenging client issues.

I returned to a deeper sense of meaning and purpose for why I practice law. Rest wasn't an adversary to my law practice, but rather essential and complementary.

Focusing on making small, incremental changes over a sustained period of time is the key to creating any new habit. This includes learning how to rest. As Alex Soojung-Kim Pang wrote in his book *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less*, "Rest turns out to be like sex or singing or running. Everyone basically knows how to do it, but with a little work and understanding, you can learn to do it a lot better."



TIME FOR REST

Time is one of our most valuable resources. It is so valuable that we sell it in 0.1-hour increments. Ask yourself: How many hours do you dedicate to work and others each day? Does the current rate of work feel sustainable? Is it nourishing or depleting?

Often, lawyers will object and say they can't afford to take any time for themselves. They are too busy. As Karen Gifford and I wrote in our book, *The Anxious Lawyer*, "This feeling of 'busyness' is both a seduction and a major source of dysfunction for many lawyers. If we are very busy, we secretly believe we must be doing something important—in fact, we must be very important."

If you reflexively reject the idea that you can and should carve out time for rest, consider what effect this belief has.

Think about rest in the context of self-care. Self-care is an activity for you, by you. No one else can eat more kale or go to the gym for you. It's about identifying your own needs and taking steps to meet them. Consider activities that feel nourishing and nurturing. ■

Self-care doesn't have to take a lot of time or money. It's about the attitude or the intention you bring to the activity. Are you taking proper care of yourself? Are you treating yourself kindly?

THE JOY OF MINDFULLY WRITING



For many years, as I travel across the country, talking about lawyer well-being and mindfulness, lawyers would come up to me and ask about writing. I offer the advice that's often repeated — just write. Of course, it's never that simple but that's truly the only way to write. As Anne Lamott says, write the “shitty first draft.”

Even though I've been practicing mindfulness for over seven years, it wasn't until I took a writing class that I realized I can combine the two practices. It's a powerful experience to calm the mind and write the words that are longing to be written.

Each Wednesday, I grab my journal and drive to Oakland, CA where I sit around the table with six or seven other women. We are invited to radical

self-expression, free from judgment. It's free-form writing meaning the only “goal” of the session is to keep the pen on the page and keep writing. Sometimes, I write long winded complaints about life's injustices or irritations. Other times, a memory, long abandoned.

Then we're invited to read our words aloud. A powerful experience. It surprises me when the women sitting around the table make audible “mmm...” or other sounds, instinctively because they can relate to the words. I love it when I write something that makes them laugh (because I don't consider myself to be funny.)

What is not allowed is judgment, critique or comment. After one woman finishes reading, we move on to the next person.

As lawyers, we are perfectionists so doing anything “shitty” is terrifying. However, it’s through this experience of getting the words down on paper – good, bad, or simply passable, that we’ll be able to polish and slowly make our way to the final draft.

Many of you shared your own reasons for wanting to reconnect with your creative side through writing. Some were related to stress and anxiety management, such as, “more insight to my thoughts, an ability to limit stress through writing” and “another way to keep my anxiety in check while practicing law.” Others were held in the deeper desire for self-knowledge, “getting in touch with writing and expressing myself through the written word again” and “to overcome my own hesitation in writing.”

If this resonates with you and you would like to join a community of lawyers interested in writing, join us for [Mindfully Writing](#). ■

#MYPATHTOLAW – FINDING MEANING AND PURPOSE



Me (on the left) and my sister (on the right). Taken in Seoul, Korea circa 1987.

I watched a lot of Law & Order growing up. My family immigrated to the U.S. in 1988 (the same year that Korea last hosted the Olympics). I was 10 years old and didn't speak a word of English. Neither did anyone else in my family. As I watched, I repeated the phrases the lawyers said on the show, trying to learn the words, the intonation, the meaning.

When we moved to the U.S., we settled in Astoria, New York, where my grandparents owned a grocery store. My dad went from being an architect at Samsung to working seven days a week at the grocery store. My mom had been an art teacher; in New York, she worked at a nail salon.



Here's the thing. When you're an immigrant in a country where you don't speak the language, where you aren't familiar with its rules and laws, you get taken advantage of.

We moved into an apartment with no hot water but plenty of cockroaches and rats. We didn't know for years that you can report the landlord to housing agencies. I still remember waking up in the middle of the night, screaming, terrified because a rat ran across my torso. Once I found a cockroach in a bowl of soup.

Eventually my dad bought a laundromat. More than once, customers threatened to sue him for some claimed loss or damage to their clothing. He usually paid them because he didn't understand how the legal system worked.

I knew from watching Law & Order that there were rules in this country designed to protect the innocent, punish wrongdoers and restore justice. I loved the show. In 60 minutes, bad people were

always prosecuted and justice served. To my naive 12-year-old self, this was obviously my path: Go to law school. Become a prosecutor. Send bad guys to jail. Protect the innocent.

As a sophomore in high school, I decided I was going away for college, but my parents were very traditional and didn't approve. They often said that the only way I was allowed to leave the house was if I were (1) married or (2) dead. Neither option appealed to me.

I saved every dollar I could from my job as a cashier at Boston Market and applied for colleges out of town. I faked their signatures on the applications, completed all the financial aid forms, and got into University at Buffalo (SUNY Buffalo) 420 miles away with a full scholarship.

Once it was clear that I wouldn't need their permission or financial support, I "ran away" to college. I was 17 years old. I didn't speak to my parents for a long time after that

As immigrant working menial jobs, you often feel unseen and unrecognized. I'll never forget the summer I worked in my mom's nail salon. She told a customer (very proudly) that had I just graduated from college. The woman looked at me as if seeing me for the first time (while I was washing her feet), and said very sweetly, "Well, isn't that nice. So, will you be working here then?"

Stunned, I paused and responded that I was there for the summer but was starting law school in the fall. Her facial expression changed and she responded: "Well, good for you."

I graduated from law school at 24 and got my dream job as an assistant state attorney in Florida. There I learned that one privilege of having that role is seeing images we'll never be able to unsee and hearing stories we'll never be able to unhear.

I was assigned to the domestic violence unit where I learned that our criminal "justice" system is a terrible mechanism for helping people.

Later, I was assigned to misdemeanors court. The first day was arraignment day. The judge, through a Spanish-speaking interpreter, asked everyone who was there for driving without a valid license to move into the jury box. A group of about 30 men stood and walked over. There were too many of them for the jury box, so they huddled around it. They looked tired, with leathery skin from working in the fields all day, their hands and fingers swollen.

The judge had the interpreter tell them his rule. "The first time you're caught, it's a fine. Second time, it's 10 days in jail. Third time, 364 days." For comparison, a third-time DUI carried with it a minimum mandatory sentence of 30 days.

One by one, the men were asked to plead. Those that pled guilty were sentenced according to the judge's rule. Often the defendants didn't understand the consequences of pleading guilty, and more than once would start wailing when they were taken straight from arraignment to jail. Those that didn't plead were assigned a public defender and set for trial.

This was deeply traumatizing. Although I was in the U.S. legally, I could see myself, my family in the faces and stories of these workers.

Bryan Stevenson asks in his book *Just Mercy*: "Why do we want to kill all the broken people?" I didn't try capital cases, but his question resonates with me. As an assistant state attorney, I saw how we want to lock away, criminalize and shun people who are broken.

Like most state attorneys' offices, we were overworked (I had over 250 cases) and there was no time. No time to sit down and figure out how to help people. No time to consider what would be a just outcome. I was burning out, desperately trying to keep my head above water, and having regular nightmares of seeing my parents in the jury box—nightmares of their being taken away from me for 364 days.



I needed a change. So, I moved from Tampa to the San Francisco Bay Area. I met my husband, Jeff Curl, who is also a lawyer, and we started a bankruptcy practice. This was the perfect practice area for me (even though it doesn't make me very popular at cocktail parties). I get to help people who are experiencing financial trauma and give them a fresh start. It is healing and restorative.

The first bankruptcy case I ever filed was for a very sweet 69-year-old immigrant. He was HIV-positive and struggling with bipolar depression. After the meeting of creditors, we hugged and he cried.

I started practicing mindfulness and meditation in 2011 after being diagnosed with social anxiety disorder. This eventually led to co-authoring a book with Karen Gifford for ABA Publishing, *The Anxious Lawyer*.

Here's what I know. While my 12-year-old self's understanding of how our justice system works was flawed and naive, what I've retained is the deep desire to make a difference, to create a better world, and to live with compassion.

As Rainer Maria Rilke writes in his book *Letters to a Young Poet*: "The point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

Every day, I live with the question: "What would be the most kind, generous and compassionate response?" I am practicing living into the answer.

This article was first published in the [ABA Journal](#), [My path to law: one immigrant's journey](#). You can also find the related [The Resilient Lawyer](#) podcast episode [here](#). ■

OFFERING & WORKSHOPS

MINDFUL PAUSE:

6 MINUTES TO BETTER LAWYERING

What if you could create a more sustainable, peaceful, and productive law practice in just 6-minutes a day?

Self-paced online course designed by a lawyer for lawyers.

Regular, deliberate practice over a sustained period of time is the key to better lawyering.

Are you feeling...

- ✓ Burned out?
- ✓ Overwhelmed?
- ✓ Constantly stressed and anxious?
- ✓ Perpetually pressed for time?
- ✓ Lack focus and concentration?

Do any of these thoughts sound familiar?

- ✓ I'm so unhappy! I feel trapped and hopeless.
- ✓ I never have enough time.
- ✓ I'm not good enough. Good enough lawyer... good enough spouse/parent... Always letting someone down.
- ✓ I feel so alone. I feel like a failure; I'm the only one going through this stress.

Just like the practice of law, managing stress also requires PRACTICE.

The Science Behind Mindfulness



Job effectiveness:
Increased by 6%



Stress:
Decreased by 32%



Anxiety:
Decreased by 30%



Depression:
Decreased by 29%



Is your solution to double down and do more? Work harder. Take on more obligations. Make more sacrifices. How's it working for you? I've been there... Losing sleep because you're worried about your clients' problems. Constantly trying to see around corners.

Want to know a secret? Being a lawyer doesn't have to be this way. I'm intimately familiar with the struggles of lawyering. Seven years ago, I had constant, chronic anxiety and was diagnosed with social anxiety disorder.

I started my career as an assistant state attorney in 2004, and have been practicing bankruptcy law since 2009.

I have seen first hand the power of adding a simple mindfulness and meditation practice to my daily life.

Here's what I've learned in my journey from "the anxious lawyer" to "the mindful lawyer." We were never TAUGHT healthy, sustainable behaviors that promote well-being. ■

MINDFUL PAUSE

FIND YOUR EASE: RETREAT FOR LAWYERS



The theme for the retreat is relaxation and rejuvenation. You'll have an opportunity to practice mindfulness, meditation, engage in dialogue with other like minded lawyers, swim, soak in the hot tub, enjoy nature, go for walks, read, journal and sit by the fire in the evenings.

“ We’ll explore various ways of bringing more joy into everyday life – both in our law practice and elsewhere. ”

About Seascape Beach Resort

Luxury of a Resort with all the Comforts of a Beach Home

You will enjoy this beautiful resort with 17 miles of beach. We'll have the opportunity to practice walking meditation, enjoy the sunsets and have a firepit in the evening complete with s'mores right on the beach!

The entire property is located on the cliff of the Pacific Ocean. Watch the dolphins play in the ocean. Go for a swim, soak in the hot tub, curl up with a good book, relax, restore and rejuvenate.



The closest airports are Sonoma County Airport (30 mins drive), San Francisco (SFO), San Jose (SJC) Airports.

FIND YOUR EASE

Meals

All meals:

- ✓ Dinner on Friday
- ✓ Breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks on Saturday
- ✓ Breakfast on Sunday
- ✓ Beach fire and s'mores on Saturday evening



Accommodations

You'll have the option of staying in spacious one-bedroom, or two-bedroom suite – each unit has a fully furnished kitchen, living room, dining room area and fireplace with a coastal vacation home feeling.



Dates

June 22, 2018 – June 24, 2018 (Friday – Sunday)

If you're interested in learning about other dates, complete the form below.

Tentative Schedule

Friday

4:00pm Arrivals
6:30pm Dinner
8:00pm Opening Circle & Meditation

Saturday

7:00am Yoga and Meditation
8:30am Breakfast
10:00am Meditation Practice
11:00am Hike
12:30pm Lunch
1:30pm Free time
4:00pm Incorporating mindfulness into lawyering
7:00pm Dinner
8:00pm Campfire

Sunday

7:00am Yoga and Meditation
8:30am Breakfast
10:00am Closing Circle
11:30am Departures

Available Packages

All bedrooms at Seascapes have one bed for your maximum comfort and relaxation. However, you can choose to share a bed with someone who is attending the retreat with you (please contact me if you wish to inquire about this option). Every bedroom has its own separate bathroom.

Deluxe Suite (Single Accommodation) – \$1,750
2-Bedroom Villa – \$1,350 per person

Email smile@theanxiouslawyer.com to register. ■

JOIN THE MINDFUL LAWYERS COMMUNITY!



Mindful Lawyer Community

Creativity • Mindfulness • Community

We are building a community of lawyers for support, regular discussions on all aspects of being a lawyer (and a human), and learning opportunities.

Our goal is to bring together like-minded lawyers who live with mindfulness, value creative practices and care about building a sustainable career with purpose and meaning.

In speaking with lawyers across the country, we are noticing a clear theme arising.

- *We're looking for a community. Lawyering can be isolating and lonely. There are many challenges we face and many of us are looking for support in meeting those challenges.*
- *We want to feel more connected – with others, with ourselves.*
- *We reject old, broken paradigms. We want to figure out what the alternative looks like and find a new model for lawyering.*

Many of you shared wanting to have more time for creativity, fun, family, friends, and space to simply be instead of constantly having to do.

What's Included in Mindful Lawyers Community Membership:

- ☑ Unlimited access to a community of like-minded lawyers (Hosted on easy-to-use communication platform, Slack.)
- ☑ Topical Slack channels relevant to you and your interests
- ☑ Quarterly webinars: Experts to present on various topics around mindfulness, well-being, and creativity
- ☑ Monthly Office Hours: Drop-in video chat sessions to get help with a project, talk through ideas, etc.
- ☑ Daily Writing & Creativity prompts: Short prompts for cultivating a habit of creativity.
- ☑ 31-Day Habit Sprints: Struggling to carve out "me time?" Want to learn a new hobby? Read a novel? Write poetry? Choose your goal and let us be your accountability partner.

Investment

Mindful Lawyers Community

\$199 per year

Register

Join the community!

Mindful Lawyer Community \$199.00 USD

**JOIN THE MINDFUL LAWYERS
COMMUNITY!**



