

Let Go and Free Yourself

■ By Courtney Schulnick



As my mother has always said, “Man plans, and God laughs.” It seems as though that saying holds truer these days. The reality is that life is unpredictable under the most normal of circumstances. But the challenges created by the pandemic have called for us to be increasingly flexible and adaptable in light of

the growing uncertainty. Whether it be learning to navigate virtual platforms, working in different environments, juggling the demands of those living in our household or caring for family members—our ability to sustain ourselves (and others) has been put to the ultimate test.

What helps so many people, me included, better navi-

gate through chaos is planning out our weeks, months, or even years. Planning offers us a sense of control and perhaps even a bit of clarity. But, as so many of us have come to experience over the last several months, in a split second many of our plans were thrown right out the window due to COVID-19. When the moments of our lives don't go as planned, our minds can easily become unsettled; rather than accepting what is, we fight it and further compound our stress levels.

We can alleviate some of our stress by better understanding our relationship to the stressors in our lives and by recognizing our insistence for things be a certain way. We can begin by noticing what clinging feels like and then invite ourselves to do just the opposite—let go. While it may go against the grain of what we're used to, it can help us to become more resilient to life's experiences, even when they are unpleasant. You may not have recognized it, but we actually do it all the time when we go to sleep. It can be very difficult to fall asleep when we get lost in our thoughts. But, when we just notice them without having to engage in them, the mind and body can rest, and then we are more easily able to fall asleep.

One of my favorite lessons on letting go comes from a story by Jon Kabat-Zinn in his book *Full Catastrophe*

Living. As the story goes, monkeys were destroying the crops of farmers. Because the hunters believed in kindness and compassion, killing the monkeys wasn't an option. So, they had to find a way to capture the monkeys without harming them. They cleverly decided to cut a hole in a coconut that was just big enough for a monkey to put its hand through. They put a banana inside the coconut, placed a wire through the coconut to secure it to the base of a tree, and then waited for the monkey. The hole was so ingeniously crafted that while the monkey's open hand could fit into the coconut, the clenched fist couldn't fit out of the hole. All the monkey had to do to be free was simply let go of the banana. But most monkeys won't let go.

Much like the monkey in this story, we have tendencies to hold on to things, even when they don't serve us. With mindfulness, we can notice the pieces of our lives that hold us back and then consciously choose to let go and free ourselves. So, can you try taking a moment to notice what you are tightly holding on to and, perhaps, let go to free yourself?

To learn more about my mindfulness programs that are being offered via Zoom, please visit www.courtneyschulnickmindfulness.com or call me at (856) 261-8875.

MEMBER EDITORIAL

From YLD Runner to Ironman

■ By Jordan Strokovsky



It was September of last year, and I was gasping for breath as jellyfish stung me from head to toe. When I got out of the water, the stings briefly burned even harder as they were sprayed with vinegar. Then I got on my bike and rode until my neck ached, and I started losing feeling in my toes. But I still wasn't done, because once I got off the bike, I had to run a marathon. For the last five miles, it felt like my legs were about to snap off. But the moment when I crossed the finish line, legs still intact, and could call myself an Ironman, was one of the greatest of my life.

This year, of course, things are different. With all large events canceled, there is no Ironman Triathlon this year, which makes me all the more grateful that I was able to complete one last year (and sympathetic for those who have been training for this year's). But I would never even have had the opportunity to try if not for the Young Lawyers Division Running Group.

Several years ago, when I was still an associate in search of an excuse to leave the office before 8 p.m., I reached out to the YLD with the idea of forming a running group. Running has always been my favorite way to relax and stay healthy, and with a group of fellow attorneys involved, I had a built-in excuse to leave (relatively) early for my weekly “networking event.” In no time, we formed a steady group of five to ten young lawyers.

Besides getting our weekly miles in, our group—a rich variety of attorneys and law students—participated in organized charity runs and often enjoyed some post-run drinks together. As invaluable as the exercise may have been, the

camaraderie was even better. With no speed demons among our ranks, we'd go at a casual pace, letting us breathe and make conversation.

Naturally, I ended up becoming good friends with quite a few members of the running crew. When one of them, Ernest Holtzheimer, proposed we do the Ironman, well, I wasn't about to leave all the bragging rights to him. We began training for a half Ironman, and ultimately—a year after our first emails back and forth about it—completed the full one, jellyfish stings and all.

There's a professional side to this as well. The running group got me involved with YLD more generally, which led to me joining its Executive Committee and later increasing my role within the Bar Association through the State Civil Litigation Section.

My point here—besides that the pandemic has really ruined things—is that networking doesn't have to be painful, formal, or boring. There are other attorneys out there who share your passions, and even in this strange new normal, you can find ways to connect with them to form both friendships and business relationships. In the meantime, if you'd like to accompany me on a socially distanced run or bike ride, get in touch.

Jordan Strokovsky (jordan@actionafterinjury.com)—co-chair of the State Civil Litigation Section—is a trial lawyer and founder of Strokovsky LLC, where he handles catastrophic injury, medical malpractice, wrongful death, premises liability, birth injury, and trucking cases.