

Wake Up to Your Life with Mindfulness

By Courtney Schulnick



As I write this article, we approach the end of May and what has been labeled, “Mental Health Awareness Month.” While it has been wonderful to devote attention to this worthy cause, the truth is that mental health awareness cannot be limited to just one month. Now, more than ever, people are increasingly recognizing the

importance of mental wellbeing; and that, perhaps, is one silver lining to the current pandemic.

Lawyers also recognize that while a career in law can be very gratifying, it can also be incredibly stressful. In 2016, the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation and ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs published a study of nearly 13,000 currently practicing lawyers and

found that approximately 28%, 19%, and 23% are struggling with some type of depression, anxiety and stress, respectively. Given the additional stressors triggered by the pandemic, these figures will likely rise in the near future.

Many employers within the legal community are cognizant of this and have made noteworthy efforts to promote the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace. Surely, businesses cannot succeed when their constituents are in a bad place and unable to provide competent representation to clients. The good news is that wellness programs can enhance work performance, job satisfaction, and optimize the outcomes that can be achieved for clients.

Marshall Dennehey is one example of how employees can benefit from such programs. In April, lawyers and administrative staff participated in my six-week mindfulness program via Zoom to reduce stress and anxiety. Laurianne Falcone, a shareholder in the firm’s Philadelphia office, noticed how the program helped her to identify some of her habitual reactive ways. By the end of the program, she was able to disengage from reactivity and choose more skillful ways to respond to even some of her most difficult of adversaries.

Tim Hartigan, a shareholder in the King of Prussia office, appreciated the program because it reminded him that we cannot control the future. But we can control

how we interact with “what is” and learn to be in the present moment without judging our experiences. According to Tim, “Life has a way of co-opting our attention. Mindfulness is my path to reclaiming it.”

Likewise, Ardyce DeChane, an administrative assistant in the firm’s Fort Lauderdale office, noticed how she often berated herself for feeling anxious about meeting deadlines and challenges in her personal life. She increasingly became aware of how this actually created additional suffering for herself. Mindfulness practices enabled her to cultivate greater compassion and kindness towards herself, which in turn, enabled her to better manage her anxiety and more effectively serve the needs of the attorneys she assists.

While mindfulness will not remove stress from our lives, it can teach us how to support ourselves so that we are able to navigate through the chaos and stress that have become so commonplace these days. Mindfulness allows us to wake up to our lives. Through this practice, we learn that what may have once seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle, can actually open us up to a world of rewarding challenges and vast opportunity.

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.

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