

Balancing the Scales—the Need for Self-Care in the Legal Field

Even though Love Your Lawyer Day is not until November 3 ([yes, it's real](#)), I'll put it out there now: I love working with lawyers. And specifically working with them to build their business development plans and create strategies to grow their practices.



Jaffe Staff

I'm certain that my clients must think I am channeling my inner therapist, as well, because we talk a lot about mindset, attitude, time (or lack thereof) and the many commitments that pull them away from business development activities. Inevitably, all these factors lead to a discussion about stress and well-being.

In the high-stakes, fast-paced world of law, lawyers are often subjected to enormous stress levels, prolonged work hours and expectations of constant high performance. They carry the weight of their clients' problems, and frequently navigate through complex and emotionally charged situations. These challenges, if not managed effectively, can lead to burnout, anxiety, depression and a host of other mental health issues.

In fact, according to ALM's 2020 [Mental Health and Substance Abuse Survey](#), 31.2% of more than 3,800 attorney respondents feel they are depressed. Lawyers are roughly three times more likely to suffer from depression than the average U.S. adult.

Recently, I had the privilege of hearing integral coach and psychotherapist [Faith Geiger](#), LMSW, speak about the need for self-care in all professions, but especially in the legal profession. Faith is a [Human Potentialist](#) and founder of [TULLA](#), and advises companies about workplace culture and human transformation to help their employees flourish mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically and financially (yes, these are all connected!). I asked her to take a deeper dive with me into the need for self-care in a very stressful industry.

FAITH:

As I prepared for this Q&A, I thought about why people might gravitate toward this field and how pursuing truth, order, fairness and justice can be immensely gratifying and fatiguing at the same time.

What drives people or companies to need legal support can range from the mundane to the nuanced and complex. Navigating the law and developing creative solutions for clients while managing human behavior, emotions and belief systems requires a lot of energy and time. I am learning that the skills and attributes that make an extraordinary attorney have parallels to what makes an extraordinary leader, coach or therapist: active listening, humble inquiry, creativity, the ability to forge a trusting alliance, emotional intelligence, non-judgment, honesty, perseverance, ethics, critical thinking, discernment, seeing around corners, balancing logic with intuition and love, and more.

I also contemplated what it might feel like to practice law and use my time, energy and cognitive horsepower to mitigate risks, avoid loss, seek justice and truth, and protect my clients. I realized that this type of work could create a perpetual state of hyper-vigilance and hyper-responsibility, causing attorneys to live in an internal state of stress.

If part of our job is to scan the environment for "threats," our minds and bodies will hold mental and emotional stress. Without healthy routines and habits to process and release stress, sabotaging behaviors can slowly sneak into our lives, leading to substance misuse, addiction, poor sleeping and eating habits, and potential mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety.

I have heard attorneys say they feel like they are also therapists to their clients. As an integral coach and psychotherapist, I know firsthand how much capacity and energy it takes to hold the space clients need to reveal what brought them to seek my services. It also takes a lot of energy to develop creative, innovative solutions for my clients.

But attorneys are not trained to be therapists; if they were, self-care would become an ethical obligation, not a luxury.

Here is your invitation: See self-care and mental health as part of being an extraordinary attorney (and human), especially in a justice-driven, time-based field. To balance the scales of justice, *you* must be balanced, starting from within.

Q: What do you think are the biggest obstacles to practicing self-care or getting mental health support?

Time and stigma.

When people stare at their workload and priorities related to their family and personal lives, time becomes the obstacle to self-care and mental health support, especially when financial success is tied to the number of hours billed. When we work in a time-based field fueled by a sense of urgency (and stress) from our clients, we can become entrenched in the construct of time. Time drives us, so, of course, we put off self-care because we don't have enough time, or we think self-care takes time *away* from other urgent or important matters.

But that is the fallacy in our thinking – that self-care takes time away from something else. Spending time on self-care gives us energy and improves our overall well-being, making the time we spend in other areas of life far more productive, impactful and joyful.

What if one hour a day of self-care makes the time you spend at work and with your family even more potent? You become a force multiplier, giving you an edge in your work while cultivating greater health.

And I don't have to say much about the stigma toward mental health or seeking mental health support. We know there is still a stigma. Although it is improving, we still have a ways to go to dissolve the old narrative that therapy is only for people who are sick or mentally unwell. If you want to enjoy your life, you have to nourish your multidimensional health. Everyone can benefit from having a therapist or coach in their life.

Q: What do you suggest people should do if they want to begin practicing self-care or seeking mental health support?

With compassion and curiosity, start with an honest assessment of your life and come to understand how you spend your time and energy. One way to assess your life is to review your calendar to see what fills time. Or, for one week, spend 10–15 minutes at the end of each day reflecting on how you spent your time and energy, and how it made you feel. You will start to see things more clearly. When you have a baseline understanding of where you are, you can plan for what you want to improve or change.

To make it easy, at the end of each day, categorize how you spent your time and energy into three buckets: Personal, Professional and Social/Family. If you are too tired at the end of the day, use time in the morning to reflect on the day before.

Once you have spent a week reflecting, ask yourself: If I maintain this way of spending my time and energy for the next year (or the next five years), will I be healthy and happy? And will the most important people in my life be happy?

Based on your answers, you can decide if you want to engage someone, such as a coach or therapist, to support you in optimizing your personal and professional life.

Q: What are the top three practices/areas of focus you suggest everyone adopts to improve their health and resilience?

Breathwork. Exercise. Healthy diet.

- **Breathwork:** Techniques such as box breathing or sighing help reduce stress and tension. Practice breathing deeply (long inhalations with longer exhalations) as often as possible. The more you practice intentional breathing, the more the benefits compound over time.
- **Exercise:** Moving your body (cardio and strength training) five to seven days per week for at least 20–30 minutes; one hour if possible. Exercise is our best medicine and an antidote to depression and anxiety. Exercising in nature, such as a gentle hike, is very healing. Another great benefit of exercise is that it helps us regulate our energy, so instead of the wheels coming off when we need to destress, we learn to manage stress through healthy habits that enrich our lives.
- **Healthy diet:** Eat well to live well. Food converts into chemical potential, which we use to fuel our bodies and brains. Proper nutrition and what we eat affect our gut health, which directly correlates to our mental health. Processed sugar, alcohol, gluten and dairy can cause our mental and physical health to deteriorate and speed up the aging process.

Sleep is also essential, but might be harder to recalibrate initially. Reducing stress and getting exercise and diet in order can lead to better-quality sleep.

Q: Who or what are some of your favorite health and wellness resources?

- Dr. Peter Attia, MD: [Peter Attia](#)
- Dr. Mark Hyman, MD: [Dr. Mark Hyman](#)
- Rich Roll: [Rich Roll](#)
- Dr. Sara Gottfried, MD: [Sara Gottfried](#)

- Andrew Huberman, PhD: [Huberman Lab](#)
- Jon Kabat-Zinn: [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#)
- Jack Kornfield: [Jack Kornfield](#)
- Steven Kotler: [Peak Performance Aging: Growing Old, Staying Rad](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Calm](#)
- [Insight Timer](#)

Q: What else can attorneys do to find joy and health in their lives?

Connect to a purpose beyond your work, and anchor it to your values. When we are connected to a higher purpose, our work is a way to express our talents and potential instead of becoming our entire identity.

We are designed to flourish, so take self-care and mental health as seriously as your desire for success and passion for your work.

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Self-care and mental health support are not just desirable, but essential elements for lawyers' well-being and their ability to perform their roles effectively. By prioritizing mental health and well-being, lawyers can sustain a healthier balance between their personal and professional lives, reducing the risk of compassion fatigue and ensuring career longevity and success. After visiting with Faith, I have resolved to incorporate a self-care component in all the business development plans that I build for my attorneys from now on.

I can't thank Faith Geiger enough for sharing her time, her invaluable experience and her pinpoint acumen. If you would like to learn more about [Faith](#) or reach out to her directly, I've included a link to her website.

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**Additional resources:**

<https://tulla.love/>

[Prevalence of Major Depressive Episode Among Adults](#)