

Meditation for Stressed Attorneys

By Vanessa Nellis and Joey Soto

BEING A LAWYER IS A stressful profession. Attorneys are always looking for ways to decrease stress. For many of their schedules, it is impossible to participate in yoga regularly, practice thirty minutes of cardio each day, eat fish, avoid fast food, and exactly follow doctor's recommendations. As much as attorneys enjoy extracurricular activities, such as taking yoga classes, it is hard to commit to an one and a half hour class, not to mention the added driving time. When things are hectic in lawyers' professional lives and personal time is limited, meditation is a quick way to relieve stress, refuel and refocus.

How to Meditate

Meditation can occur using the items already found in an attorney's office. Here's how. First, choose something to focus on. If inside an office, one's focus could be the sound of breathing, relaxing music, an inspiring photo (perhaps of loved ones) or anything elevating (such as a dream, favorite pastime, etc.). If writing helps

center one's attention, quickly jot positive thought(s) down on paper. For many colleagues, listening to classical music is their preferred way to quiet their minds.

Steps to Meditating

1. Lock the door to one's office and/or let office mates know not to disturb for the next few minutes. Consider turning off the lights.
2. Sit up straight, interlace fingers and gently place hands on core center/stomach.
3. Close eyes and breathe deeply in and out through the nose.
4. Inhale and feel the breath expand one's stomach, ribs and chest, then exhale and release it out completely.
5. Think of a word that describes the ideal state of mind one would like to embody, such as gentle or relaxed.
6. For three to five minutes, simply sit, breathe and think of the word

with each exhale. If mind tends to wander, keep refocusing on the word. If an attorney truly has a hard time focusing, try slowly counting to eight with each inhale and exhale.

Simple meditation can be done almost anywhere to reduce stress and gain a balanced perspective. Meditation streamlines one's thinking, filters out any nonsensical, nagging thoughts, and helps bring laser sharp focus to one's life. It's a great alternative to caffeine during the mid-afternoon slump. Sometimes meditation causes one to visualize as though in a dream state, and other times nothing exciting happens.

It's not about what happens during the meditation, it's about what happens in the attorney's life as a result of the meditation. Calming the mind works wonders in restoring a sense of equanimity, and making attorneys more efficient at work and at home.

During meditation practice, simply take time to notice one's feelings, emotions that arise and thoughts that



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form. As the mind comes up with ideas about things to do instead of meditating, just embrace the thought, and then let it go. It is suggested that meditation be practiced five minutes a day for eight weeks. (According to the UCLA Mindfulness Awareness Research Center, eight weeks is the minimum requirement for shifting habitual responses.)

Benefits of Meditation

Reasons to meditate include:

- Reverse body's stress response, reducing the effects of chronic stress
- Improve attention, sustain concentration, speedup cognitive processing and improve working memory
- Improve physical/biological balance, slow down heart rate and breathing, normalize blood pressure, use oxygen more efficiently and sweat less
- Slow the aging process. Adrenal glands produce less cortisol, the mind ages at a slower rate and immune function improves.
- Increase creative thinking and problem solving
- Break habit. Give up life-damaging habits like smoking, drinking and drugs that contribute to more stress in one's life

How Meditation Works

Meditation is defined as, "stilling the fluctuations of the mind through pointed focus." Through meditation, attorney minds move from the extremely active thinking state (beta), to a slower more creative problem-solving state (alpha), and then to a meditative state of relaxed attention and healing (theta).

Brains' frontal lobes are located behind the forehead and is how stress-induced headaches arise. This part of the brain basically shuts down (goes offline) once an individual starts connecting with his/her breath and focusing his/her mind on one thing. The other parts of the brain also start to slow down, calming the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and reducing the stress response. 🐘