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Pandemic: Well-being: Finding Time to Be Quiet

Skills and Professional Development



In our article [“Say Yes to Well-being: How Daily Incremental Changes Can Transform our Lives,”](#) featured in the April 2020 *ACC Docket*, we encouraged readers to incorporate daily incremental changes to create true, lifelong well-being. We also included six ways to increase personal well-

being:

- Inquire about your workplace resources;
- Find time to be quiet;
- Focus on physical health daily;
- Value meaningful connection;
- Establish priorities and boundaries; and
- Know it's OK to ask for help.

Our message about making daily incremental changes to increase our well-being continues to be relevant as the COVID-19 pandemic persists. The months go by and we are still not able to return to our pre-COVID wellness routines and support structures. The news is filled with COVID-19 statistics we do not really understand, and we find ourselves wondering what we can do to maintain our health and sanity, let alone increase our well-being.

COVID fatigue

We now have a new term to describe the stress we are feeling: "[COVID fatigue](#)" has entered our lexicon over the past few months. The intense and prolonged stress we are experiencing can easily have a detrimental effect on our mental and physical well-being unless we have personal healthy coping practices to use.

As this stress builds, and we do not see a clear end to the pandemic, we may be tempted to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as taking on more hobbies to show that we are superhumans or striving to accomplish more projects than we usually would as typical high-achieving lawyers. All this activity increases our mental fatigue and does not allow us to find the quiet we need to recuperate, rejuvenate, and see the beauty and joy in our lives.

IRAC method

As stress soars and our energy levels wane, we need to analyze how to find a remedy to improve our situation. As a throwback to law school, we are applying the IRAC method to each bullet mentioned above to reach the best conclusion on how to address the stress caused by our "new normal." In July, we addressed physical well-being in the article "Well-Being During the Pandemic: How to Use the IRAC Method to Focus on Fitness."

Today, we will continue with another of the six ways to increase your well-being. As a refresher, we will:

1. Identify the ISSUE;
2. Apply the relevant RULE;
3. Conduct an ANALYSIS; and
4. Ultimately reach a CONCLUSION.

Today's topic: Find time to be quiet

First, consider the following: What is your task list for today? What is it you want to get done? Who do you need to help? The list of tasks and people counting on you will likely include clients, friends, significant others, children, parents, pets, and neighbors. In addition to all of this, you will likely spend

a significant amount of time on emails and whatever social media you have chosen to include in your life.

Now take one slow, deep breath, and notice what is likely missing from this list: quiet time with yourself. In our physical activity article, we proposed that you consider your body as your best friend, as it is always there to support and sustain you with some basic daily care. We now propose building on that concept by adding some quiet time to spend with the most important person in your life — yourself.

This may sound like an idealistic goal that is not possible given the realities of the complicated, connected lives we lead. The fact that we are expected to be “on” constantly can lead to overload. We check and deal with the constant barrage of email, news, and all matters instantly delivered to our devices. We focus on the needs of others but often overlook our own.

Could this be a major cause of our stress? If so, how can we find this “quiet time” at all, let alone each day? Let’s approach it like any other matter that confronts us as legal professionals — with our beloved IRAC approach.

Issue

We would love to find a way to add peace and calm to our hectic, worry-filled days. Our lives were already busy and now we have the added burden of ruminating about countless new issues related to COVID-19, including whether our loved ones or ourselves will get sick, and whether our jobs will change or disappear entirely.

We have all experienced changes in our lives these past months, whether we continue to work from home, have returned to our offices (likely taking on additional responsibilities in either case), or are furloughed or in transition. The unifying theme is that most of us are busier than ever. How can we possibly find the means (and the time) to give ourselves a break from the stress caused by the “new normal”?

Rule

We have heard about the potential benefits of formal mindfulness and meditation. These [stress-relieving skills](#) can help with pain, hypertension, anxiety, depression, and insomnia among other ailments.

Articles about meditation and mindfulness typically feature calm-looking people sitting in the cross-legged Lotus position set against a beautiful setting. Practitioners often take the respected Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which involves a commitment to an eight-week program that typically requires 45-60 minutes of daily practice.

Others may go on meditation “retreats” for days (or weeks) in which they return glowing and rejuvenated. That is all wonderful, but where would you get the time to do this, especially now?

Analysis

The first step is to analyze the belief that in order to find peace and quiet in your life, you must follow a formal practice or devote a significant amount of time each day — preferably the same time each

day — to your routine.

While formal practices can yield significant benefits, we propose that this is not necessary. Simply taking just a few minutes to take a step back from your normal routine — taking time to pause, slow down, and give your brain time to reset — will give you immediate results.

The most prevalent way to find calm in your life is to practice meditation. It's important to note, that contrary to what many believe, just a *few minutes* each day can yield significant results and lead to a greater sense of peace and well-being. Just as we said in our prior article on physical activity, you only need to devote a few minutes of quality time in your day to quiet your mind and experience [benefits to your mental and physical health](#).

Conclusion

The key to finding more peace in your day is to simply start taking the first small steps and experience the results yourself. If you make a conscious effort to slow down and try a few of the practices we suggest in this article, we believe you will notice a difference right away.

As with physical fitness, your “mantra” for finding time to be quiet in your day should be that the key is consistency, not quantity of time. Give yourself the gift of doing something quiet, for yourself, for five minutes each day, whether it's noting what you are grateful for before you go to sleep, or taking a walking break (which also ties into physical fitness).

Or simply sitting quietly for five minutes with your kids with no computer, television, phone, or other devices on and nearby. Wake up each day with gratitude by thanking yourself for your effort, intention, and consistency. Be kind to yourself!

Simple suggestions for daily practices

Doing what fits into your day is important, as that will lead to consistency. Please note there is no right or wrong way to get started, but we recommend silencing all devices, unless you are listening to calm music.

Here are a few suggestions to get started.

Mornings

- *1 minute – Gratitude practice:* Write down at least one thing for which you are grateful.
- *5 minutes – Upon waking:* Quietly reflect or meditate, including setting intentions for the day, noticing how your body feels, or just noticing your breath.
- *10 minutes – Breakfast:* Eat your first meal quietly — without your phone, television, or the morning paper. Talking with your family is fine, as it leads to connection, which improves mental wellness.

Workday

- *1 minute – Intentions:* Start Zoom meetings by asking everyone to be silent, look away from their devices, and set their intention for the meeting.
- *2 minutes – Breaks to “just be”:* Silence your devices, close your eyes if possible, and just breathe.

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- *5 minutes – Walk:* Take an indoor or outdoor walking break without your phone. Use your senses to notice what you experience as you walk, such as the sun pouring through the clouds, the sound of your feet on the sidewalk, the scent of freshly cut grass, or the feeling of the air on your face.
 - *10 minutes – Lunch:* Have a mindful meal, in which you do nothing but eat and savor the taste, texture, and aroma of your food — and be thankful for the food you are consuming.
 - *At the end of the day – Shut down:* Turn off and close your computer, which also needs to rest and recharge.
 - *All day – Disconnect:* For one day, try not to follow the news or check social media.

Evenings

- *1 minute – Practice gratitude:* Write down at least one thing for which you are grateful.
- *5 minutes – Before sleep:* Quietly reflect and meditate, such as noticing how your body feels or the rhythm of your breath.
- *10 minutes – Unwind:* Instead of watching television to fall asleep, try listening to calm music.
- *All night – Disconnect:* For one night, try leaving your phone in another room. Create your own plan based on what you like to do and take your first step to nurture calmness and joy in your life — it's there, you just need to be quiet for a few minutes to find it.

Parting thoughts

It's clear that COVID-19-related stressors are not going to disappear soon, so it is up to each of us to take steps to help ourselves during this unprecedented period. We cannot control what is happening in the world around us, but we can make daily incremental changes to enhance our well-being. Taking these small steps — when we can — will make us feel better.

Let's create habits of calmness to weather this and all the future storms. We know you can do it! Just sit back, breathe, and enjoy the peace until we meet again to delve into the next installment in this series. Be well!

For more well-being tips, visit [ACC's In-house & Wellness Support Center](#). For more advice on coping during the quarantine, visit [ACC's COVID-19 Resource Center](#).

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