

EVEN THE SMALLEST OF STEPS CAN HELP TO COMBAT STRESS AND MAINTAIN OUR WELLBEING.



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The Golden Rules of battling stress

There are effective ways to battle stress; ignoring it and hoping it will go away is not one of them. Although we cannot point to specific reasons for the high levels of stress identified within our profession this is no reason to deny its existence. As 75 per cent of mental health issues originate in some form before the age of 25, it is critical that such issues are addressed early.

Inherent in the study and practice of law is a highly competitive and high-pressured atmosphere, and this contributes to many young lawyers feeling overwhelmed and unprepared to confront and address feelings of helplessness, anxiety and depression. Feeling this way is completely normal, and it is high time for us to recognise these feelings within ourselves. There are a number of simple preventive measures we can all undertake in order to combat negative feelings. These are well known, but in the face of stress it helps to be gently reminded.

- 1. Don't be a beast of burden.** Getting organised at work and at home and de-cluttering your life will significantly reduce the inevitable stress that accompanies deadlines, hectic periods and the compounding effect of attempting to multi-task and juggle a multitude of tasks, obligations and commitments.
- 2. That's what friends are for.** Studies show that those who have good relationships and maintain strong social connections are much less likely to become enveloped in negative feelings. Take time out of your day to release by phoning a friend or meeting someone for a coffee. In this age of social media, we falsely assume that keeping in contact is as easy as sending a Facebook message or an email. In actuality, a five minute face-to-face chat is substantially better for relationship building and drags us away from our computers.
- 3. Shake it off.** Get a hobby or other fun pastime and get involved. Procrastinating and dog walking are particular favourites among my friends. When you are feeling overwhelmed turn to one

of these activities and use it as quiet, enjoyable time just for yourself where the external pressures do not intrude.

- 4. Let's get physical.** The benefits of exercise cannot be emphasised enough. It stimulates chemicals within the brain, leaving you feeling relaxed, happier and energised. Furthermore, it promotes better sleeping habits as well as combating a variety of diseases. Try to make physical activity fun, recruit a friend and make it a part of your regular routine so it will be less of a chore and something you actually look forward to. Partake in a fun-run and challenge yourself, work out while watching your favourite TV shows and the time will fly, or even try something different like rock climbing or surfing. Commitment is key, and an enjoyable activity will ensure you remain steadfast in your goals.
- 5. Just breathe.** Taking some time each day to focus on relaxation is a very easy way to bring perspective to situations confronting you and quell feelings of stress and anxiety. From engaging in yoga or tai-chi classes to simply taking five minutes to focus and calm down at your desk, the benefits of meditation and relaxation exercises are enormous. Listen to classical music, walk outside, breathe, enjoy the fresh air and ponder the things you enjoy in life. This will place you in a better state of mind to tackle the tasks ahead.
- 6. Sleep on it.** There is no substitute for a good night's rest. No amount of caffeine the next day will make you any more productive or focused in the long term. A solid eight hours must be abided by in order to rejuvenate and allow our bodies and minds to recover.

Through individually abiding by simple steps such as these, we as young lawyers may begin to combat the mental issues that plague many of us in our practice and pursuit of legal excellence. "Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise" – Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*). ●

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