

Lawyers Lives In Balance Tips For Managing Stress

By John W. Olmstead, MBA, Ph.D, CMC

Our consulting and coaching clients are telling us that maintaining a balance between professional and personal life is their top challenge, concern and priority. Standing room only is the order of the day in our Life on Balance speaking presentations to bar and other professional associations.

Lives out of balance result in stress with numerous mental and physical negative consequences. Medical consequences can include:

§ **Minor** - colds, flu, backaches, tight chest, migraine and tension headaches, etc.

§ **More Chronic** - hypertension, ulcers, addiction, diabetes, colon or bowel disorders, kidney disease, mental, etc.

§ **Killers** - heart disease, stroke, etc.

Stress is one of the emotions that include both fear and anxiety. It is the emotion that results from the desire to terminate, escape from or avoid a real or imagined, current or imminent, negatively reinforcing event. Stress is in the eye of the beholder. 80 percent of the effect of a stressor is our perception of it as

detering us from achievement of a goal. The critical test for a situation achieving stressor status is whether the individual feels out of control.

You can prevent stressors from occurring or stop them once they begin by increasing **CONTROL**.

In Martin Seligman's book - Learned Optimism, the author advises that people learn to become helpless. When people have no control over their environment they give up trying to exert control. Optimism is associated with high motivation, success, achievement, and mental health. Pessimism is associated with opposite traits. Seligman suggests the following model for obtaining control:

§ **Adversity** - recognize when it hits.

§ **Beliefs** - be aware of what you believe about the adversity.

§ **Consequences** - be aware of the emotional and other consequences of your belief about the adversity.

§ **Disputation** - question whether your beliefs are the only explanation.

§ **Emergization** - be aware of the new consequences (feelings, behaviors, actions) that do or could fol-

low from a different more optimistic set of beliefs.

In general, if you expect bad things - bad things tend to happen - if you expect good things - good things tend to happen. **Focus on positive emotions.**

Unless stress is effectively managed - your personal and professional life will be out of balance.

Learning to manage stress in your life is much more difficult than many imagine. It requires conscientious awareness of stressors in your life and efforts at developing coping skills.

Typical causes of stress include:

§ Financial worries

§ Housing problems

§ Family or health problems

§ Illness or loss of a loved one

§ Spousal separation or divorce

§ Worries about the future

§ Child care problems

Your stress management strategy should begin by identifying stressors in your life. Here are some self-assessment questions that you should ask yourself using the following self-assessment scale:

Rate yourself on the following scale by assigning a numerical rating according to the following key:

1 - Never 2 - Seldom 3 - Sometimes 4 - Most of the Time 5 - Always

Personal Time

- | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I work too many hours. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | My work commute is too long. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | I travel too often in for my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | I work too many weekends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | I take too few vacations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | My time is not my own on vacation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | There is too little time for me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | There is too little time for my family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | There is too little time for my friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I don't have time for hobbies or other interests. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Money

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. | I feel pressure to make more money. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I need to pay off student loans and other debts. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | I need more money to provide for basic needs of my family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I want money to reach/maintain a certain lifestyle. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | I feel that I have to make more money as a sign of success. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | I feel I have to make more money to provide me with more power. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | I need more money so I can feel that I am secure. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | I need to make money to demonstrate my worthiness. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Health

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. | I am concerned and worried about my personal health. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | I have not been living a healthy lifestyle. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | I often worry about my future health. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | I am worried about a health condition for which there has been no diagnosis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | I am worried about a health condition for which there has been a diagnosis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Family

22. I am worried about health conditions of family members. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I worry or am worried about my children's lifestyles. 1 2 3 4 5
24. I worry or am worried about my spouse's fidelity. 1 2 3 4 5
25. I struggle and worry about childcare for my children. 1 2 3 4 5
26. I worry or am worried about my children's school performance. 1 2 3 4 5
27. I often fight with my spouse and my children. 1 2 3 4 5
28. I worry about the health and security of my/spouse parents. 1 2 3 4 5

Work - Culture

29. I do not trust my partners/other attorneys. 1 2 3 4 5
30. Communications in the office is poor. 1 2 3 4 5
31. We are expected to work too many hours. 1 2 3 4 5
32. I don't get recognition or respect. 1 2 3 4 5
33. I don't know if I am successful at work. 1 2 3 4 5
34. There is too much competition at work. 1 2 3 4 5

Role and Demands

35. I have too much work. 1 2 3 4 5
36. My work has too many details. 1 2 3 4 5
37. I don't like the work that I do. 1 2 3 4 5
38. I don't get to do the work that I like. 1 2 3 4 5
39. I am in a dead-end job. 1 2 3 4 5
40. My role, objectives or expectations are not well defined. 1 2 3 4 5
41. I am not trained for the work I am being asked to do. 1 2 3 4 5
42. I do not have the competencies or skills to perform the work I am being asked to perform. 1 2 3 4 5
43. There is excessive travel. 1 2 3 4 5
44. I feel pressured to get client business. 1 2 3 4 5
45. I do not like the business aspects of being a lawyer. 1 2 3 4 5
46. The work is boring or repetitive. 1 2 3 4 5

Control

47. I have no say in how the work is done. 1 2 3 4 5

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 48. | I am not able to plan my work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 49. | I do not get to participate in decision-making. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 50. | There are excessive interruptions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 51. | I do not have adequate staff and other resources. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 52. | I have fears about my job security. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 53. | Insufficient knowledge about firm plans. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Relationships and Support

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 54. | I am isolated and I work alone, apart from other workers. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 55. | I have poor relationships in the firm. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 56. | I have lack of respect from peers. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Average Score = Add up the numeric score on each response and divide by 56. _____

TIP #1: Take notes and note ideas and improvement areas as your complete the self-assessment questionnaire.

TIP #2: Prepare an action plan with completion timetables identified. Self-accountability should be designed into the plan.

TIP #3: Implement the plan. Work on one goal or behavior at a time until each behavior becomes a habit. Then move on to the next.

TIP #4: Appoint someone with nagging rights to help keep you on track. Hire a coach if necessary.

TIP #5: Follow-up and review.

Good luck on your journey to life on balance and staying energized and productive.

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