

What's It Going to Take? A Challenge to Beat Holiday Stress

Sometimes we ask ourselves, "What's it going to take?" just to make it through the day, when our already-stressed lives tumble even more out-of-control. Of course, it might come in the form of "Why me?" or "Why now?" or "Curse you, Murphy's Law!"

Consider the stresses the legal profession places upon us. The business side of law (such as billing, advertising, client courting and courtesies, unending administrative emails, and employment issues) constantly chips away at the available hours in the day to actually *practice*, while finance, tax, and banking challenges plague us in our sleep.

But, before we even get to work, we face the challenge of time on the tarmac. Nashvillians spend an average of 33 hours a year in rush hour traffic, according to INRIX's 2017 Global Scorecard on Traffic. Add the holidays and typical year-end demands to the mix and it is no wonder we are deprived of sleep.

Stress Can Create Physical Problems

Recent research shows cells release RNA-proteins that turn into stress granules at the cellular level—which may negatively affect your health. From Alzheimer's symptoms and super-sensitive hearing to memory loss and weight gain, the list of negative stress effects can take their toll. If you get migraines or a cold, often before a trial or impending deadline, you might suffer from stress.

So, what's it going to take to reduce it or at least make it manageable?

Some of us answer that question with alcohol, drugs, stimulants, or other indulgences (like the shop-a-holics or chocolate lovers) that leave us in worse shape—literally and figuratively—than when we began.

According to the Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program (TLAP), 70% of lawyers suffer from stress related issues; 18% of lawyers suffer from alcoholism and addiction; 33% of lawyers suffer from significant mental health issues. Ted Rice, Executive Director of TLAP, noted that out of about 350 new cases this year, about 50% came from Middle Tennessee alone. The good news is that TLAP offers more than just alcohol and drug recovery consults; it also offers a full spectrum of behavioral health services, including programs to help attorneys manage their stress and improve their well-being. In the new year, TLAP is planning a weekly group to help attorneys receive peer support.

Volunteers "really have helped make the program accessible across the state," said Rice. With the addition of two new clinicians in 2019, TLAP will be offering a twice-weekly general support group, an exciting development as TLAP celebrates its 20th anniversary in the new year.

So, What's Worked for Others?

With a sophomore in Ravenwood High School and a first-year student at the University of Virginia, Louise Brock, General Counsel, Labor & Employment at Bridgestone Americas, Inc., understands firsthand the demands mothers face when practicing law. Having relocated from Cincinnati four years ago, Brock is one of six labor and employment attorneys practicing at Bridgestone's new North American headquarters in downtown

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Nashville, addressing issues for over 50,000 employees throughout the US. In her role, occasionally Brock has to travel, and finds it tough when she would rather be volunteering at her son's events. Throw in the year-end performance reviews, annual budget management, and holiday events, and it becomes a logistical challenge.

Brock discusses the key to reducing stress for her during the holidays, "...protecting my calendar. In other words, I block off specific times for working out or attending my son's activities and share them on the family's kitchen calendar. Then, I'm sure to protect those commitments. If someone at work sees that I'm busy on Outlook, then they need to check out available times instead of making demands on my current obligations. Calendar communication, coordination, commitment, and control give me such peace of mind."

Erin Polly Palmer, 2018 NBA President and attorney at Butler Snow said, "I tend toward anxiety, and that anxiety usually worsens around the holidays

because of the added obligations. Along with the calming effect that my family and friends have on me, I get relief through running and listening to true crime podcasts. The combination of physical activity while listening to something that occupies my mind—along with a realization that I don't have it as bad as the folks in my podcasts—is a huge help."

Sometimes, all it takes is perspective.

Bill Bates, Farrar & Bates, is a three-time cancer survivor who continued to practice through those difficult times. At age 45, Bates was diagnosed with Stage 4 bladder cancer the same year his daughter was graduating from high school and looking at colleges. Bates remembers thinking that, "I'd never see my girl graduate from college. We are all engaged in things like litigation, death, divorce...a thousand different things," but for him, the law became a balm. "It is my life's work...it's satisfying, comforting and challenging. When I was in chemo or radiation, it was a comfort, a distraction

from everything else."

"The knowledge that you may die is a wakeup call to better understanding what is important in your life. Cancer taught me to better live and appreciate each day as a gift. Learning to meditate as a means of relaxation and insight helps keep work and life in better perspective. "Attitude is also very important," he stresses with a sly smile that lets you know a whopper is coming, "I'm hard to kill and very resilient." His advice is to not get drawn into bad things or the minutiae. "Whatever you are going through now is not going to last. It may seem bad in the moment, but it's going to change. I developed a profound appreciation for another day or another week to live." He feels that doing things for others and meditation were the most natural ways for him to break the cycle of stress. "Living life as if it's your last day to live helps keep stress in check," he suggests.

Not just those who have practiced for years feel the long-term toll of stress. Denmark Grant, a new associate at Baker Donelson, is no stranger to the demands a practice puts on a lawyer and his family. Grant states that "[a]s someone who grew up with a father who was a busy litigator (Charles Grant), I saw firsthand the demands that accompany a profession that asks more from its practitioners than the traditional nine-to-five. He de-stressed by playing tennis, going on early morning family jogs at Granbery Park, visiting a massage therapist with my mom, and watching action/adventure movies with my older brother Donovan and me. In beginning my own career as a lawyer, these examples remind me to try to make the effort to blend relaxation time with family time."

"Budgeting at the end of the year

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The Historical Committee has completed over 65 oral histories of NBA members!

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for a nonprofit adds additional end-of-year stress because a lot depends on donations from donors," says DarKenya Waller, Executive Director of the Legal Aid Society. "While cuts and pledges ebb and flow, my family is my first go to—whether it's game night or going to a movie. My husband and I are contemplating CrossFit, but I'm a little afraid." (*Editor's note: Aren't we all?*) But her best stress buster? A hug from her 8-year-old.

Doug Berry, Miller & Martin, said that when he was a young litigator with a demanding schedule, "...nothing was better to relieve stress than to play basketball. Before a huge trial, I learned that to escape the city and just breathe deeply helped. Compartmentalization is always a great technique—imagining leaving the stress *physically* behind in the city." Now, he enjoys spending time on his family farm, where relaxation is the center of activity.

Berry's technique is also great to bust the stress that is compounded by a tough commute. When one sees a significant landmark at the halfway point, see "to do" list posted there. You can focus on relaxing your body on the rest of the ride home (but stay awake!).

Jim DeLanis, who not only practices law, but is also Davidson County Election Commission Chair, points out that this year has been one of the Commission's most challenging, but building in a routine helps a lot. DeLanis believes that through the stressful times, "you have to institutionalize stressbusters. Add a workout to your calendar just as you would a court date. And keep it." His choice: handball. "If I have a 6:00am match twice a week, I have to get there because three others are depending on me. Accountability is a great way to ensure you will show up."

Ann Butterworth, Assistant to the

Comptroller for Public Finance, said, "I have learned that unfortunately, I am neither a super hero nor an alien and must rely on my favorite "F" words:

- Friends
- Family (including furry four-legged)
- Forgiveness
- Food (healthy)
- Faith
- Fun
- Forty winks
- Fitness

Recent research demonstrated that even just ten minutes of mild, not very strenuous, exercise can benefit the brain, helping us remember more. But not all of us are athletes. In fact, many suffer from disabilities or other challenges that make it difficult to get regular exercise. Plus, most of us just don't seem to have the time to dedicate to something new, right? Wrong.

Obvious Conclusion

So, what's it going to take to get you to consider ways to beat the stress? Working out, meeting with friends and family, meditating, controlling your calendar, keeping things in perspective, walking in nature, or beginning a mindfulness practice. You can probably think of even more ways, but the key is to commit to your own well-being and health so that you, too, can enjoy the season, not sweat the small stuff, and just relax. ■



KAREN BLAKE, Conflicts Attorney at Baker Donelson and former City Attorney of Franklin, Tennessee, has practiced meditation since living and working in Japan 30 years ago. Her other favorite stress-busters are travel, walking to and from work, and cheering on the Nashville Predators.

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— Jill Presley, Marketing & Communications Director, Nashville Bar Association, October 31, 2018