



Mindful Lawyering Newsletter from the Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law
Committee of the New York City Bar Association

Issue No. 6 | Winter 2024

Welcome to the Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Committee Newsletter!

About Us: We are a Committee of the New York City Bar Association and are here to serve the legal community in pursuit of balance. The Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law Committee provides programming, events, and resources to support members' wellness through the practice of mindfulness, including meditation, mindful movements, and other modalities that help bring one back to the present moment. Studies have found that mindfulness practices can assuage stress and anxiety, enhance emotional resilience, decrease implicit bias and reactivity, and increase creativity and productivity.

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Lisa Podemski

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Connecting one story at a time.

Upcoming Events Sponsored by the MWBL

Join us for in-person and virtual events.

For more information on our committee, click on link below:

[MWBL City Bar Homepage](#)

Thanks to our contributing members Jordana Confino, Ellen Frank, Aimee T. Latorre, Maureen Reilly, Wendy Silva and Annie Wang.

We are grateful for the support and contributions from our members and the legal community at large. If you have any ideas, art or written work that you would like to share with us, we would love to hear from you. Our sub-committee reviews all submissions and considers them for future issues. Do not hesitate to reach out by email with your suggestions, comments and entries to: mindfulness.citybar@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Disclaimer: The opinions in this newsletter are solely of the author and do not represent the views of the New York City Bar Association.

Message from Chair, Lisa Podemski, Esq.

Winter is often a season when we look inward. We tend to want to be inside and cozy. Although days start getting longer after the Winter Solstice in December, darkness still comes early. Now is a good time to focus on more contemplative pursuits and practices. Perhaps you can start or pick up your lapsed meditation practice, even if it's just 5 minutes when you wake up or before you go to sleep. Maybe you can focus on some creative activities you used to enjoy, such as drawing or crafting. There are many things we can do when the time calls for introspection that can increase our feelings of contentment or joy when we may otherwise feel forced to be indoors. Take this time as a gift to connect with yourself on a deeper level.

Please join us at our regularly scheduled and special events posted at the end of this edition. Also, if you'd like to contribute to our Newsletter or find out more about who we are and what we do, please reach out.



Listen Up! This Article Just Might Save Your Life

by Jordana Confino, Esq.

In addition to honoring Valentine's Day, Galentine's Day, and other variations of this upcoming day to honor relationships, February is also Heart Health Awareness Month.

That's actually extremely fitting because research shows that in addition to being absolutely critical for our mental and emotional well-being, our relationships also dramatically impact our PHYSICAL health and even our life-expectancy.

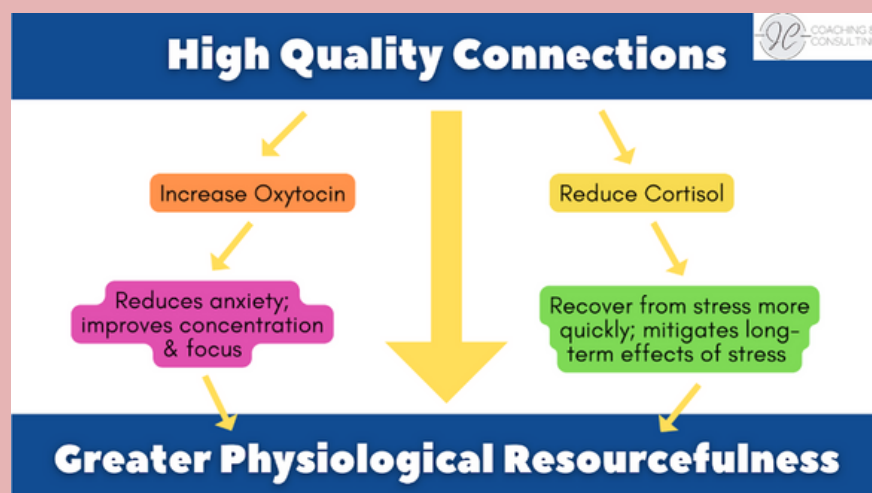
Indeed, some studies suggest that our relationships impact our health more than any other factor, including diet, exercise, and even smoking. And while there are definitely a number of things at play here, this can largely be explained by the way social connection affects our physiological response to stress.

Before I explain what I mean, I want you to close your eyes for a minute and think about how you typically respond to stress.

If you're anything like me, you probably imagined yourself hunkering down and walling yourself off from social interaction. If so, you're not alone.

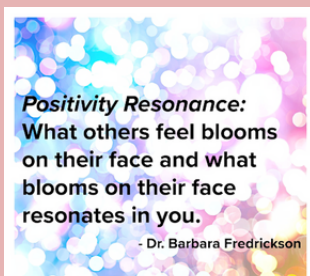
Many people – especially us Type A, high-achieving lawyers – tend to retreat into their shells when the going gets tough, working late (even when it means we'll miss our only opportunity to connect with our partner that day), eating lunch at our desks (even if we've barely stood up, much less moved, since breakfast), and going out of our way to avoid hallway chats that might slow us down.

I will admit I am guilty of all of these things (evidenced by the salt crystals in my keyboard from far too many lunches spent at my desk!).



But this approach, which we BELIEVE reflects our willpower and determination, is actually counterproductive for multiple science-backed reasons. The first is that each time we have a positive social interaction (or what positive psychology researchers call a “high-quality connection”), our bodies release a neurotransmitter called oxytocin, which not only reduces anxiety and heightens concentration, but also helps our blood vessels stay relaxed and our heart cells regenerate and heal from any stress-induced damage.

And if that weren’t enough, each high-quality connection also reduces the level of cortisol in our bodies, helping us recover more quickly from stress by bringing our heart rate and blood pressure back to resting, and protecting us from long-term negative effects. In other words, social support can effectively CANCEL OUT the negative effects of stress, imbuing us with a degree of physiological resourcefulness that ultimately enables us to work harder and more effectively without sacrificing our minds and bodies.



Critically, our social interactions need not be lengthy to count. Indeed, even micro-moments of positive connection can be enough to do the trick. Leading positive psychology expert Barbara Fredrickson coined the term “positivity resonance,” which she defines as those fleeting moments where two people experience a mutual surge of warmth, joy, humor, or affection

causing them to achieve a sense of oneness. According to Fredrickson, it’s these micro-moments of connection that facilitate the sort of intimacy that strengthens a relationship and ultimately leads to love.

They also support longevity. In a recent study of romantic couples, researchers found that the frequency of positivity resonance was a powerful predictor of not only relationship satisfaction, but also the physical health and lifespan of both partners. Specifically, partners in relationships with high positivity resonance had milder declines in their health over the next 13 years and were statistically more likely to be alive 13 years later. That is huge!

So while there is absolutely nothing wrong with grand Valentine’s Day gestures (mine generally involves making sushi and dancing in the kitchen in pajamas), it appears that the micro-moments of positive connection we sprinkle into our days (or don’t...) can pack a far more powerful punch (that happens to be what we do every Friday night 😊🥰).

And this is equally true for platonic relationships. I absolutely love Brené Brown's metaphor of friendship as a marble jar. According to Brown, every time someone does something kind to support you or earn your trust, they "put a marble in your jar." And, at the end of the day, it's the people who eventually fill up your jar that become your truest friends. Think about it. It is so simple to put a marble in the jar. And yet we so frequently speed by and overlook the countless opportunities we have to do so every day. It need not take a lot of time, but it does require intentionality and a willingness to slow down just enough to take a moment to connect. So for the remainder of this month, I challenge you to invest in your relationships (and yourself!) by seeing how much "positivity resonance" you can sprinkle throughout your days. Make a commitment to allow yourself to start filling up your jar (and your heart) through these daily micro-moments of connection. If you'd like to deepen your practice and make sure you aren't taking any of your most-cherished relationships for granted, I encourage you to experiment with mental subtraction—a positive psychology-based exercise designed to help increase feelings of gratitude and appreciation for things in our lives.

To perform this technique, complete the following steps:

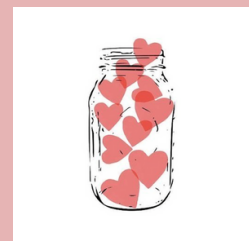
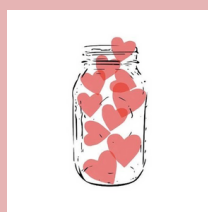
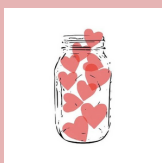
Step 1: Call to mind a relationship you currently have that you really value. Take a moment to close your eyes and visualize that person, how you feel about them, and what makes your relationship with them so important to you.

Step 2: Now imagine that the relationship you're envisioning NEVER materialized, or that it was taken away from you or completely eliminated from your life in a flash. Take a minute to really imagine what that would be like for you. (Seriously — close your eyes and allow yourself to fully process what that would mean for you and what it would feel like.)

Step 3: Come back to the present and take action accordingly—whether it's by explicitly communicating your appreciation for that person to them or otherwise demonstrating it with your actions, or simply making an intention to deeply savor your time together.

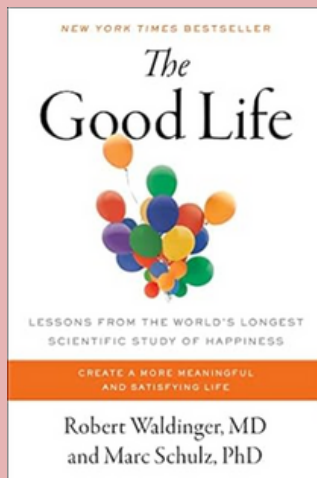
This last step is critical.

Joni Mitchell famously sang, "Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone." But it doesn't have to be that way. We CAN increase our awareness of what we've got while we still have it — while we still have the opportunity to fully savor and appreciate it and express our gratitude and appreciation to its deserving recipient. All it takes is willingness to slow down and a bit of conscious effort. Not a high price to pay for something that could not only enhance your relationships, but also save your life!



Book Review: *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness* by Robert Waldinger M.D. and Marc Schulz Ph.D

by: Aimee T. Latorre, Esq.



Few books have left me with such a lasting impression as this *New York Times* Bestseller. In general, I usually take book recommendations with a grain of salt. What might be a great book for some, might be a bore for others. However, when the MWBL Book club selected *The Good Life* for its next read, I looked into the synopsis and then downloaded it right away. By the time I was halfway done, I knew I had the perfect Christmas gift for everyone on my list. After all, who doesn't want to know how to have a happier and more satisfying life? Who doesn't want to look back on the day, year or even one's life, and feel like it was a life with joy purpose and meaning? Just reading the book synopsis will tell you the secret is simple...relationships. However, knowing that simple answer did not satisfy

my curiosity. What kind of relationships lead to the "good life"? How many relationships? How do I balance work and personal relationships? How specifically do relationships translate into happiness?

Authors Dr. Waldinger and Dr. Schultz walk readers through highlights of the 80-year Harvard study on human thriving using personal stories of the hundreds of participants that were followed through their adult lives and in some cases, even the children of participants were followed. Satisfaction in all different kinds of relationships were observed, including romantic partners, married couples, friends, families, coworkers, and neighbors. Even their day to day interactions with strangers was considered. Interestingly, they not only studied how relationships affected people's happiness and life satisfaction, but also how these relationships influenced physical health too. For example, one of the early conclusions was that marital happiness at age 50 was a better predictor of good physical health in late life than cholesterol level. The study also found that relationships with more secure attachment would lead to better health, mood and even better memory later in life.

We only need to think back a few years to the isolation of quarantine to remember how the strain of removing human connection negatively affected so many. Conversely, the people who we sheltered with, got us through the difficult times. Reaching out to family or friends through Zoom or FaceTime helped, but could not replace in-person human connection. What a joy it has been to celebrate and support one another together once again.

So, how do strong relationships help people gain happiness and health benefits? The authors state, "[e]motions drive relationships, and noticing them matters." Relationships seem to help people be more mindful of and process emotions better and this is not limited to romantic relationship. Having a good relationship with a co-worker could boost your job satisfaction, and overall life happiness too. Job satisfaction often spills over into home life.

This is especially true today as flexible remote work arrangements become more common, and while helpful in many areas, are also causing work-home boundaries to disappear.

One very important thing to note, is that strong relationships do not happen automatically. The authors encourage self-reflection and then putting effort into your relationships. Relationships need tending to in order to be strong. Further, there needs to be mutual support and vulnerability for adults to form secure attachment. In others words, there has to be some give and take on both sides.

As attorneys, we spend a great many hours with work colleagues. The never-ending list of tasks and the pressure of billable hours may make it seem like a misuse of time to chat with colleagues about anything other than client work, however, the Harvard study highlights that investing in work relationships can improve overall health (and arguably improve productivity.) It is not difficult to see how dedicating at least some time prioritizing work relationships would reduce burnout and workplace stress.

The authors do not argue that a good life is about having a perfect relationship, perfect job or the perfect life. Rather, the good life can be found when facing the peaks and valleys of life by being supportive and allowing yourself to be supported as well.

Effectively, The Good Life uses scientific data to uphold the age old wisdom of "Love thy neighbor" and take it a step further by adding "...and allow yourself to be loved."





WHEN SHIFT HAPPENS

by Wendy Silva, Esq.

Some may find it in making New Year's resolutions; some may find it moving into or out of a job or relationship; some may find it experiencing trauma or a joyful milestone. Whatever it is, it can aptly be called "the shift." It is that moment in your life that moves you from inaction to action, from a sense of being stuck to clarity. It may feel as if the shift happens suddenly, but in fact it is the many micro-choices that collectively pivot you in a new direction. Think about the choices you have made that have led you to this moment. What were the shifts? Ultimately, can you be confident in knowing that you were in control and take full responsibility for where you are now, even if some of the choices you made you would not necessarily make again? Isn't that the purpose of living?

When moving from "this to that", there is a real opportunity to sabotage or embrace the shift for ourselves. Our rational minds kick in to convince us "this has never been done", "how will I afford to make this change?", or "I can't leave this situation for the unknown." But there is also an opportunity to ask "will this be something I will regret not doing?" or perhaps consider "this shift will lead me one step closer to what I truly want or need at this time."

The shift may bring along a sense of obligation, adventure or even fear, but the journey remains yours. Let the emotional and physical subtleties you feel allow for the shift to happen.

Whatever the circumstances, know that you alone have determined what brought you to this moment of change. Surely, it is a culmination of the small decisions you have made along the way that formed you into who you believe you are today. What prevents most of us from making "the shift" is our thoughts that hold on to old patterns and weigh us down or blame others for the impact they had on us. This is not to say give in to your every whim with reckless abandon for the sake of a shift that you do not understand. Nor does it mean to sit by the sidelines leaving things to fate that in the most ironic of ways is a [in]decision that contributes to "the shift", but rather to notice what comes up. And when fear of the unknown creeps in or worry of what others will think or say, acknowledge the thought and release it. Embrace the chance you have been given to make the shift and try something new or find out who you wish to become. Trust in your ability to grow, adapt and become resilient along the way. The fact that you are reading this now is a testament to all those shifts you have already made. And when shift happens again and again, lean forward, step into it and welcome the opportunity it presents.



BUILDING CONNECTIONS THROUGH STORYTELLING

by Ellen Frank, Esq.

Robert Waldinger and Marc Shultz, the co-authors of the book *The Good Life* and scientists behind the longevity study on happiness found that people who are happier and live longer have a warm connection to other people.

Former United States Senator John McCain reflected that the worst part of being a prisoner of war was the solitude. Loneliness is a real danger to one's health. As an example, to combat loneliness, Israeli family members set up loud speakers near the Gaza border so they could send messages to their loved ones being held hostage with the hope that they would hear and know they are not alone. In a social science study involving social supports and geometric slants, scientists have proven that a person who is accompanied by a friend will perceive a hill to be less steep than someone who came alone.

One way to develop warm connections with people is to have meaningful conversations. I recently heard a presentation given to lawyers at the City Bar by Chirs Graham, CEO of [TellPeople, Inc.](#) on storytelling. Telling the right story, Graham says, to the most people, improves self-confidence. Listening to him, I learned important tips about improving communication, including:

How you feel determines what you do.

Don't be afraid of people. Think of people who you are hesitant to talk to as just someone who has more experience than you. Don't give them more power than they have.

Even when people disagree with you, being curious and open to understanding why they think the way they do will foster conversations.

Graham also provided three quick ways to improve communication with people who do not agree with you. First, ask for a specific example of their concern, then ask them what they think will happen and lastly, show empathy, by saying " I think what I'm hearing is..."

Every story he told was well rehearsed. The story sounded natural and as if he were telling it for the first time. Graham explained that he practices his stories and watches people's reactions. He relays each point and tailors the story to the audience. He suggests a way to help develop a story is to find a picture that is meaningful to you and place it on your desk where people will notice it. Each time someone comments about it, you can tell a story about the photo. The more you tell the story and built upon it, the better it will become.

He also advised asking follow-up questions when meeting someone at a networking event. If someone shares information about a weekend, you could say, "tell me more about that" or "what's something you did that made the weekend good?" For quick conversation starters, begin with "what's keeping you busy these days?" or "what are you excited about?" Start with open-ended questions and ask follow-up questions.

He says practising public speaking will enhance your life. We all need human connections and through Covid, we lost many of our connections. To make new connections, join a committee at the bar, find a hobby (for me, birdwatching) or join a group like [Toastmasters International](#).

I have found post-Covid, there is more multitasking with people constantly looking at their phones and texting instead of talking. I have participated in walks with the [South Shore Audubon Society](#) and found beauty in watching the ducks and geese in Hempstead Lake State Park. Along the way, I met some new people. I am also a member of the Toastmaster's International organization where I practice and learn public speaking skills. Both groups are open to anyone with chapters across New York City and Long Island. I have learned that the secret to a long, healthy life is to keep exploring, make new friends, develop relationships, and learn something new every day.



WINTER IN QUOTES

At our last committee meeting, we had the opportunity to share with one another a quote or writing that embodies a sense of winter.

Here are some favorites that were shared by our committee members. Do any resonate with you?

“In the midst of winter I found there was within me an invincible summer.” ~Albert Camus

“That’s what winter is: an exercise in remembering how to still yourself, then how to come pliantly back to life again.” ~Ali Smith



A Love Note to My Body

~Cleo Wade, Author of Remember Love (words for tender times)

**first of all,
I want to say
thank you.**

**for the heart you kept beating
even when it was broken**

for every answer you gave me in my gut

**for loving me back
even when I didn't know how to love you**

for everytime you recovered when I pushed you past our limits

**for today,
for waking up.**





**We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming virtual events.
Please click on blue links to register!**

Mindfulness Break

[Friday, January 12, 2024](#) (previously recorded)

[Friday, February 9, 2024 | 1:15 p.m. – 1:35 p.m.](#) (virtual)

[Friday, March 8, 2024 | 1:15 p.m. – 1:35 p.m.](#) (virtual)

Yoga for Lawyers Series

[Thursday, January 25, 2024](#) (previously recorded)

[Thursday, February 29, 2024 | 7:00 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.](#)

[Thursday, March 28, 2024 | 7:00 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.](#)

Freedom from the Inner Critic for Lawyers

[Thursday, February 8, 2024 | 6:30 pm – 7:30 pm](#)

Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Book Club

Selected Reading: [Burnout](#)
by Amelia & Emily Nagoski

[Thursday, February 15, 2024 | 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.](#)

Missed a past newsletter or podcast? Click below.
[Lawyers in Balance and Mindful Lawyering Podcast](#)

For more information or to apply to join our committee, visit:
[MWBL City Bar Homepage](#)