94th Annual National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges
October 14-17, 2020  San Diego, CA
Was Cancelled due to COVID 19

This Program Was Presented as a Part of Insolvency 2020, the All Industry’s Webinar Series Sept 16 - Oct 24, 2020  Developed by ABI in Response to the COVID 19 Cancellation of Live Conferences

Mindfulness: Why is it on Everyone’s Mind?

Prof. Scott L. Rogers, University of Miami School of Law
Christina Sava, Esq., Vicente Sederberg LLP, Los Angeles, CA
Paul S. Singerman, Esq., Berger Singerman, Miami, FL
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Mindfulness, Compassion Fatigue, and the un-Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress

BY SCOTT ROGERS

The practice of law is intellectually engaging and calls for a great deal of effort and capacity. The demands placed upon lawyers and that lawyers place upon themselves to excel and win, can be a source of great fulfillment and, when pressure mounts, can be overwhelming and depleting. For many lawyers, the intellectual rigor of practice, which involve reading, analyzing, deliberating, drafting, reviewing, strategizing, and arguing, make up much of the landscape of the law. It is, however, but a partial view. For the heart of legal practice often touches the heart of who we are as human beings in ways we may not always appreciate, owing to the relentless drive to do well, win, and help solve other people’s problems.

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. reminds us that the life of the law is not logic, but experience—an insight that runs deeper than even he may have realized. As systemic concerns over lawyer health and well-being take center stage, we are all encouraged to take stock and, as needed, take action to attend to self-care and the quality of our emotional lives.

Compassion Fatigue

This month’s column explores an area of increasing concern in the law known as compassion fatigue. If the term is new to you, compassion fatigue, also known as vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress, refers to the cumulative emotional, physical, and psychological toll of ongoing exposure to emotionally charged experiences. These can include the traumatic stories we hear and images we see, along with interactions with anxious, confused, sad, and angry clients and colleagues. Importantly, compassion fatigue is different from burnout, which is brought on by the intensity of workload stress. The stressful nature of our work, however, can exacerbate compassion fatigue, and burnout and compassion fatigue can co-exist. Fortunately, compassion fatigue is treatable. It is important to appreciate its telltale signs and to take action to ameliorate its impact on our well-being, productivity, and health.

Signs of Compassion Fatigue

• Feeling overwhelmed and depleted
• Becoming emotionally numb and detached
• Having difficulty sleeping, headaches, and weight loss
• Experiencing disturbing memories and images, while awake and when dreaming
• Inclined to anger, irritability and worry
• Withdrawing socially, at work and home
• Harboring feelings of self-doubt, guilt, and self-contempt
• Seeking escape through alcohol, drugs, work, sex, food and other objects of addiction.
• Loss of purpose and job satisfaction

Many of these symptoms may be experienced periodically and dissipate. However, if you experience them over time, and regularly work in a helping or healing capacity or in an emotionally charged environment, they may indicate compassion fatigue. The American Bar Association reports that lawyers are especially susceptible to compassion fatigue if they practice in areas like criminal, family or juvenile law, which can involve witnessing accident scenes, viewing graphic evidence, listening to victims’ stories, and dealing with reports of trauma and victimization. As caring human beings with shared experiences and the capacity to empathize with those who are suffering, it is important to be attentive to the emotional residue that we all can pick up from our work.

What You Can Do

One of the most agreed-upon treatments for compassion fatigue is self-care. While the importance of self-care is probably a familiar refrain, implementing it in our lives can be challenging owing to feelings of not having enough time, believing that it is a sign of weakness, or misconstruing what constitutes self-care. Turning your attention to one or more of its commonly espoused forms—especially those you enjoy and may find to be waning—can be beneficial. These include:

• Exercise
• Sleep
• Relaxation
• Nutritious eating
• Therapy
• Mindfulness practice
• Social connection

Mindfulness meditation is included in most lists of self-care yet stands apart in a few notable ways. First, most forms of self-care are an explicit part of daily life, e.g., eating, sleeping, and exercise, and the challenge many grapple with is finding balance, or getting enough of it. Meditation, however, is regarded by many as a “nice to have,” and many conclude that they do not have time for it. At the same time, practicing mindfulness meditation is not only useful as an end in itself for well-being, but also helps to establish a steadier state from which to meaningfully engage in other forms of self-care.

Self-Awareness

You may have friends and family who share with you their concerns for your emotional well-being. Often, though, people are too busy to notice, or feel uncomfortable sharing their concerns. Greater self-awareness allows us to more readily notice when we are not quite ourselves, and to pause and check for signs of compassion fatigue. Doing so may sometimes result in an unexpected wake-up call. The initials of compassion fatigue are “CF,” which is a grammatical device that means “compare with.” It can be helpful at times to compare yourself today with yourself at a good period in your life. If that comparison suggests that you are not quite yourself—perhaps more irritable, prone to anger, experiencing headaches or having difficulty sleeping, feeling sad or exhausted, or self-medicating—it may be worthwhile talking with someone and exploring forms of self-care that resonate with you.

A New Cause for Action and Avenue for Relief

In many ways, our empathic and compassionate human capacities, coupled with our motivation to help others who are suffering, amid a stressful and combative landscape like the law, can lead to the unintentional infliction of our own emotional distress. It is a cause for action, and there are steps we can take to find relief and feel better so that we can do better for ourselves, our clients, our families and friends, and our profession.

One of the reasons mindfulness meditation has become so popular is that it helps to develop resilience. As discussed in previous columns, while mindfulness practices can be relaxing, an important aspect of their utility is developing the capacity to remain steady amid emotionally agitating moments. A key to this is not learning to grip and bear it, but rather perceiving with greater clarity what is actually taking place. And because mindfulness practices are often calming, their benefit as a form of self-care is compounded. You can visit http://bit.ly/dchabulletin to read previous columns appearing in the Bulletin and the Florida Bar News on mindfulness insights and a series of practices that you can bring into your busy day to help enrich the quality of your life. You may want to begin with articles that discuss (1) The Three Minute Breathing Space and (2) Mindful Listening.

Closings with a S.T.E.P. in the Direction of Mindfulness

As with sleep, exercise, social engagement, and eating, establishing a regular mindfulness practice is recommended to more fully and reliably experience its benefits. As we close this article, we can together take a S.T.E.P. in this direction with a short practice. It is one that you can do amid an emotionally challenging moment for a few breaths. The instruction is to:

• Stop
• Take a Breath, Aware of the Breath
• Expand Awareness Around the Object
• Proceed

Even now you can practice. “Stop” or slow down the momentum of this moment by forming the intention to take a few moments and practice mindfulness; you are reminding yourself that you are here. “Take a Breath” and, as you inhale and exhale a little bit more deeply for a few breaths, bring awareness to the sensations of the breath flowing through your body. The key here is a pivot toward greater awareness. “Expand Awareness” beyond these words, or whatever has the lion’s share of your attention in the moment, and take in the larger field. Listen for sounds, feel the temperature and movement of the air, notice aroma, observe whatever arises and passes through the visual field. This is shifting into a state of what has been termed “choiceless awareness” or “bare attention,” as you practice being present for the moment, as it is. When you are ready to do so, “Proceed,” carrying on with your day—perhaps bringing a little of what you cultivated through this short practice into the moments that follow. We might think of this as the Intentional Infliction of Emotional De-stress.

Scott Rogers is founder and director of the University of Miami School of Law’s Mindfulness in Law Program, and the University’s Mindfulness Research and Training Initiative. He is a nationally regarded expert on mindfulness and has been sharing mindfulness with members of the legal profession since 1992. Scott can be reached at srogers@law.miami.edu.
What do we want?

Mindfulness in Law!

By Scott L. Rogers
About a year ago, the comic strip Bizarro depicted a group of monks gathered at an assembly where their leader, megaphone in hand, shouted, and the throng replied:

“What do we want?”
“Mindfulness!”
“When do we want it?”
“NOW!”

The rapidly growing presence of mindfulness across the legal landscape—from Bar conventions and section meetings, to law firms and government agencies, to law school programs and course offerings—echoes the urgency of the Bizarro message. Indeed, if you’ve kept up with the influx of mindfulness training for lawyers and judges, as well as the publication of books, Bar Journals and law review articles discussing mindfulness; you’ve likely marveled at the pace of change over the decade. More than 20 law schools, recognizing the crucial role they play in equipping future lawyers with a robust set of tools to navigate the challenging terrain of law practice and life, offer mindfulness courses and training to their students. At the same time, just as the humor embedded in Dan Piraro’s image relies on paradox, so too the very idea of infusing into the law the practice of mindfulness—often regarded as a New-Age, touchy-feely subject associated with navel-gazing and spacing out—appears to many as an oxymoron.

In fact, mindfulness is a form of mental training that carries with it benefits in the areas of cognitive performance, emotional intelligence, and health and well-being—areas of great importance to lawyers and to those who look to lawyers for their wise counsel, reflective demeanor and problem-solving expertise. It is receiving widespread attention in the popular culture, largely owing to a compelling body of medical and neuroscientific research vouching for its efficacy. There is perhaps no more important time than today in the evolution of law and society—where distraction, distress and distrust are so prominent—for a tool that serves these important ends to be introduced to lawyers and other members of the legal profession.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice of paying attention to present-moment experience in a manner that is engaged and unassuming. “Engaged” means attentive, interested and observant, and “unassuming” means being without judgment—open and receptive to what arises in the field of awareness. By intentionally paying attention, moment by moment, we cultivate a more direct and clear relationship to what is arising, and, to the extent we are able to remain connected to this experience, are more responsive to what a given situation requires. As attorneys, our being responsive to the continually changing and demanding landscape of our professional life is fundamentally important in order for us to excel at the work we do, and to do it, day in and day out, without losing our edge or being worn down.

Consider for a moment the importance of paying careful attention to colleagues, clients and adversaries, and the times when your mind is focusing on something else or misinterpreting what is being said. Consider also the benefit of being able to keep your cool amid emotionally charged encounters with difficult people and upon learning undesirable news. It’s not so much that we can’t navigate our way through these situations, as it is that we are not doing so as effectively as we can. And, there are times when, notwithstanding our clear intention to remain calm and collected, the situation simply overwhelms us.

The Science of Mindfulness

Over the course of the last decade, an exceptional body of medical and scientific research has been directed to studying mindfulness. Thanks to new technology allowing us to peer more deeply than ever into the activity, function and structure of the brain, there has been an accelerated growth in attention to, and volume of, mindfulness-focused research.

On the medical front, research has found mindfulness practices to be connected with decreased levels of the stress hormone cortisol, to lead to improved functioning of the immune system, and to alleviate the suffering of chronic pain, help heal psoriasis and reduce cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Delving even deeper, recent findings report mindfulness to influence the “expression” of genes associated with inflammation and to slow the rate of cellular aging.

In the neuroscience realm, researchers have found mindfulness practices to be associated with a thickening of the regions of the brain associated with focus and concentration. They have also found that meditators have stronger connections between brain regions, show less age-related cortical thinning when compared to a control group, and reveal greater amounts of gyration (“folding” of the cortex), which may allow the brain to process information faster.

In the mental health arena, along with being a helpful tool for working with anxiety and depression relapse, mindfulness has been found to be helpful in treating conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, borderline personality disorder and addiction.

My colleague, Paul Singerman, experienced in bankruptcy law and who has taken a strong interest in mindfulness, tells audiences that while it may seem that mindfulness is “too good to be true,” in his opinion, it just may be as good as it seems. But, anyone who takes an interest in mindfulness soon learns that practicing mindfulness is hard work!

The Practice of Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness is easy to learn. It involves a subtle shift in the attention you bring to what you are doing, moment by moment. For example, while you have been reading this article, it is likely your mind became distracted by people, sounds or even your own thoughts. Mindfulness involves realizing that the mind is distracted and having the mental wherewithal to direct your attention back to the task at hand. In a moment, I’ll share with you a mindfulness exercise that involves placing attention on the breath. But do not lose sight of the fact that at this moment you are placing your attention on these words, and doing so intentionally and with the capacity to notice when
your mind wanders and, if you choose, to return your attention to these words is . . . well, mindfulness.

You might wonder why this is important. After we practice the following mindfulness exercise, I’ll share with you some of the reasons why it may be one of the most important things we do, personally and professionally. First, let’s shift gears and move from thinking about these words to thinking about something else — the breath. We’ll also try to move beyond thinking, to experiencing the breath in a more direct manner.

1. Begin (with eyes open) by placing your attention on your breathing.

2. Think to yourself: “I am breathing in . . . I am breathing out,” as you follow each of your next three breaths.

3. Now, more directly experience the breath by feeling the rising and falling of your belly with each of the next three breaths. It may be helpful to close your eyes.

What did you notice? First, were you able to think about the in-breath and out-breath? This involved shifting your focus and speaks to the faculty of attention. You have the ability to place your attention where you choose, a skill not to be taken lightly. Next, were you able to shift from “thinking” about the breath to experiencing it more directly? This more immediate “knowing” likely became pronounced when you shifted your attention to feeling the breath moving through your body with the rising and falling of your belly. Lastly, how would you describe the experience? For many, the experience of placing attention on the breath for a few moments can be calming or relaxing. While this isn’t always the case — and it isn’t the primary objective of mindfulness practice — it is a nice benefit you likely will experience from time to time.

In a moment, we’ll take our exploration of mindfulness to the next level and where the scientific community is focusing its attention.

But, first, lower or close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing for the next five breaths.

### Mindfulness Exercise #1

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3. Now, more directly experience the breath by feeling the rising and falling of your belly with each of the next three breaths. It may be helpful to close your eyes.

Did you notice your mind wandering? If you’re like most people, you did. Spoiler alert: If you continue to practice mindfulness, you will come to realize just how much your mind wanders. This can be a source of distress as you realize your mind has a mind of its own, so to speak. It also creates an invaluable opportunity to do something about it. Mindfulness is a training of the mind. Research points to the extraordinary capacity of the brain to be trained and to restructure itself in alignment with the training — a phenomenon known as neuroplasticity.

A recent Harvard study addressed both the mind’s tendency to wander and its consequences, highlighting why it can be helpful to train your mind to wander less (or to be more aware of its wandering). Dan Gilbert and Matthew Killingsworth had subjects report, at random moments during the day, whether or not they were on task. For example, if they were working on a project but at the time they were prompted realized that their thoughts were elsewhere, they were off task. The researchers found that people’s minds wandered about 47 percent of the time. It’s like our minds are puppy dogs that are continually distracted.

A cautionary lesson is that we tend not to realize when our mind wanders; this can have implications for our productivity, focus, organization, listening and decision-making. This alone is cause to take seriously the adverse effects of a distracted mind and consider a tool like mindfulness. A second finding that Gilbert and Killingsworth report — and one which claimed many headlines — was that when the mind was off task, people reported experiencing lower mood. Hence, “A Wandering Mind is an Unhappy One.”

What can we do about this? Let’s return to the exercise and add an important instruction.

1. Bring yourself into a posture that is upright and stable.

2. Lower your eyes (or close them if you prefer; after you learn the complete instruction).

3. Bring your attention to your breathing, following the in-breath, following the out-breath.

4. Rest your attention on the flow of the breath through your body, with the intention of keeping it there.

5. When you notice your mind wandering, bring your attention back to the breath.

6. Do this for a few moments, then lift your gaze or open your eyes.

Do you notice what was added to the instruction? An important mindfulness insight is that it makes sense that the mind wanders, and there is nothing about mindfulness practice that tries to stop the mind from wandering, or clear the mind of thoughts. Mindfulness is oriented around allowing the moment to be as it is — thoughts, feelings, body sensations and all. Rather than resist or react unthinkingly to what may be unpleasant or unwanted, the practice is to recognize what is arising and bring attention back to the original object of attention — be it the legal case you are reading, the person you are listening to, or the breath. We practice with the breath in order to strengthen our ability to notice a wandering mind and become more expert at bringing it back.

While the mindfulness instruction may...
find the discipline to practice it.

of mindfulness are realized by those who
out at the gym, so too the manifold fruits
Just as a competitive advantage comes
as exercising the “muscle” of attention.
strength, so too mindfulness is regarded
measurable benefits to muscle mass and
the object. Just as physical exercises bring
mind has wandered and bringing it back to
mindfulness exercises that you can listen
find a series of one- to 20-minute guided
listened at the end of this article, you will
be found on the Internet. On the website
listen to a guided recording; many can
six-step instruction. It can be helpful to
sitting for a set period of time (say, five
formal mindful sitting practice entails
considered “formal” and “informal.” A
into your workday in ways that are
seem simple, many find it to be extremely
calling for establishing a more enduring stability.
will have gotten the better of you.

The Big Picture

The rule of law evolved to bring or-
der out of chaos and establish a vehicle
for human beings to rise to the highest
levels of intellectual achievement, com-
merce, social connection, and health and
well-being. Today, the practice of law is
regarded by many as having re-entered a
state of nature where rules are subverted,
civility is lost, and the bottom line has
become the top priority. Mindfulness,
like the rule of law, serves as a vehicle
for establishing a more enduring stability.
In many ways, it is refreshing to see the
legal profession — charged and equipped
to serve society, resolve conflict and es-
ablish a more stable order — looking to
mindfulness as a tool to help serve this

Learning More

The webpage, www.mindfulnessinlaw.
.com/lshba, provides information and re-
sources you will find helpful for further-
understanding and practice of

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Scott L. Rogers is founder
and director of the Uni-
versity of Miami School of
Law’s Mindfulness in Law
Program and co-director of
the UMindfulness
Research and Practice
Initiative. A nationally
recognized leader and
lecturer, he has shared
mindfulness with thou-
sand of legal profes-
sionals. He co-chairs the
Mindfulness in Law Joint Task Force of the Dade
County Bar Association and Federal Bar Asso-
ciation (South Florida Chapter) and collaborates
on neuroscience research exploring brain and
behavior changes that may accompany mind-
fulness training. Frequently interviewed for his work,
Rogers is the author of “The Six-Minute Solution:
A Mindfulness Primer for Lawyers,” “Mindful-
ness for Law Students,” “Mindfulness & Profes-
sional Responsibility” and “Mindful Parenting.”
(srogers@law.miami.edu; 1211 Miller Dr., No.
A212, Coral Gables, FL 33146)
Bob represents a client who is selling its business. Terese's client is interested in purchasing this business. Both enter the negotiation prepared. Still, given their clients' needs and concerns, and the uncertainty inherent in the negotiation process, there are periods that get intense, positions seem intractable, and things get personal. The balcony is made for moments such as these.

The Mindfulness 101 column in the November 2019 issue of GPSolo eReport, “Negotiations and Going to the Balcony,” addressed the interplay of mindfulness and negotiation. The column considered how negotiating with other people involves an internal negotiation in which emotions, beliefs, and physical sensations can generate inner conflict and influence decision making, often obscuring insight into why we act as we do. Bob's negotiation with himself, while preparing the night before, on whether to offer a 10 percent or 15 percent reduction in purchase price is challenging enough, let alone the challenge involved in negotiating in real time the next day with Terese. Amid intense negotiations, the metaphorical “going to the balcony” can be helpful as it involves imagining looking down on the problem and its participants, and allows one to be less attached and emotional and better able to see the bigger picture.

Formulated by William Ury in his book Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations (Bantam, 1991), “going to the balcony” offers a compelling metaphor for being more effective in resolving disputes, and one that assists us in taking a deeper look at the role mindfulness can play in facilitating more fruitful negotiations. The scenarios below walk through the same inflexion point in Bob and Terese's negotiation, illuminating some of the potential benefits afforded by a regular mindfulness practice and of being more mindfully aware.

**Negotiating Without a Trip to the Balcony**

Bob gets nervous sensing that Terese is ready to walk from the deal. His client really wants to sell and is willing to offer a 20 percent discount. Bob decided prior to the negotiation to offer at most 10 percent. Now everything seems to be unraveling. He worries that he came out too confident and is anxious. He feels flush and wonders if Terese sees the beads of sweat accumulating on his forehead.

Absent a technique like going to the balcony, Bob's agitated state can be consequential. It is hard for him to think clearly, unfounded assumptions take hold, and he becomes emotionally overwhelmed. All can lead to a digging in, or an all-too-hasty compromise.

Bob digs in and sticks with 10 percent. It's the plan he went in with and he chooses to stay the course. He feels weak at the thought of giving in to Terese. It all happens so fast, and he hopes Terese was bluffing. She listens to him and to his dismay declines the offer and thanks him for his time. As she gets up to leave, she wishes his client well. She wasn't bluffing.

**Accepting an Invitation to the Balcony**

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With a negotiation technique in hand, and perhaps some prior experience employing it, Bob responds differently. He isn’t as quick to react, calms down, and engages in a more reflective process.

Realizing he is becoming frazzled, Bob makes a beeline for the balcony. Believing that the few minutes he needs to regroup will be difficult and awkward if he sits silently, he requests a short break to use the bathroom, and excuses himself. In the bathroom, he wipes his forehead and takes a series of slower, deeper breaths, which help him relax. A few moments later, he feels calmer. He makes the decision to go back and offer a 15 percent discount. Terese listens intently and soundly rejects the offer. The constellation of agitated thoughts, feelings, and body sensations kick into high gear and Bob again eyes the balcony.

While the metaphor is immensely useful, absent the skills developed through mindfulness practice, its utility is often reduced to the tactical maneuver of “stepping back,” “taking a deep breath,” or “pausing” so as to reenter the negotiation a little less agitated, a little more relaxed, and perhaps having more thoughtfully considered the issues. As evidenced above, such excursions to the balcony can be calming and clarifying, but they can also be short lived and accompanied by a recurring need (often ignored or too challenging to execute) to return to the balcony.

In contrast (though really as a complement), the benefits of mindfulness practice help cultivate a more enduring quality of awareness that, by its very nature, results in greater clarity and emotional resilience amid challenging moments, rather than providing a temporary respite and opportunity to regroup.

The challenge is that when mindfulness practice is seen as a relaxation technique, the balcony is viewed as a place to calm down so as to be able to take a step back, see the bigger picture, and come up with a better plan. This is useful and sometimes will save the day. But the mindfulness practice offers much more.
As noted in the diagram reprinted above from the November column, the balcony is a place where both doing and being take place—problem solving, analyzing, taking action, as well as observing, noticing, attending. But what exactly does this mean in practice?

**Going to the Balcony Mindfully**

Let's assume that Bob has begun practicing mindfulness on a regular basis and see how his practice factors into his effectiveness as a negotiator, and what it means to *mindfully* go to the balcony.

The morning of the negotiation, Bob spends 15 minutes, as he does most mornings, practicing mindfulness. He alternates each day between two popular mindfulness practices known as Focused Attention and the Body Scan. Focused Attention has helped him develop his capacity to stay focused and notice mind wandering (among other benefits), and the Body Scan has helped him detect signs of physical discomfort, developing greater resilience amid uncomfortable moments.

Like preparing for a tennis match with endurance exercises, such ongoing mental exercise equips Bob to more naturally remain focused and steady in the midst of a challenging negotiation.

In the bathroom, Bob takes a few moments and rests his attention on his breath. He detects a whirlwind of thoughts, many pessimistic, and how they rattle him. Because he notices them, he is less likely to get caught in them and, owing to his ongoing practice, his attention steadies and a frantic mind begins to settle. He senses the tension in his chest and a sinking feeling in his stomach. These lead to more thoughts, but he remains focused on the body sensations and is not distracted. He knows that the body sensations will come and go, as this is his experience each morning. And he knows that while they are unpleasant, they are bearable. He considers doing a more engaged mindfulness practice known as RAIN but chooses not to, as he knows it wise to rejoin Terese in a few minutes.

As he washes his hands, Bob reflects on the fact that he has prepared well and is doing his best. Terese's client would likely do the deal with a 20 percent discount. He reminds himself that he considered a lot of factors in deciding on 10 percent. However, given his intuition that Terese may walk, he offers a 15 percent discount. Terese listens intently and soundly rejects the offer. Bob is disappointed and knows he has a decision to make. Given that his client would be happy with offering 20 percent and appreciating deep down that part of his resolve is to impress his client, he lets go of that need and asks Terese to help him understand why her client seeks more than 15 percent, which seems reasonable to him. Terese replies that 15 percent is a reasonable offer, but her client would not be able to guarantee payment unless another deal closes favorably. Bob suggests they enter into an agreement in which Terese's client accepts the 15 percent discount contingent on the favorable deal closing, or else his client will provide a 17 percent discount. Terese agrees.

**When There’s No Time to Climb the Stairs**

It was useful for Bob to take a short break, draw on a short mindfulness practice to calm down, see things more clearly, and to come up with a plan, maintaining flexibility. There are times, however, when the heat is on and there is no opportunity for a break. Much as in a tennis match, there are moments when all one gets to do after losing a huge point is wipe the sweat from ones racquet and brow and approach the baseline.

Gathering that Terese is ready to walk, Bob senses that the deal is unraveling and feels anxious. He notes the rise in his heart rate and, in response, gently slows his breathing. Having steadied himself a little, he remains focused on what Terese is saying. He detects sweat beading on his forehead and observes the coolness against his skin. He follows his intuition and bumps the offer to 15 percent, after which Terese explains why her client can’t accept. Together they fashion a contingent deal at a 15 percent discount and, should the contingency fall through, close with a 17 percent discount. Terese agrees.

**The Many Advantages of Mindfulness**

The four scenarios above provide a glimpse into the evolving advantage practicing mindfulness can offer—from being so caught in the drama that useful techniques are overlooked, to meeting challenges as they surface in real time. The mindfulness invitation to
visit the balcony is not to escape from the action but to be comfortable (enough) in the midst of it. Having a regular mindfulness practice makes a difference and, as the fourth scenarios suggests, the larger opportunity is to naturally be more mindfully aware and responsive such that our preparation and expertise bring out the best we have to offer, without having to try so hard.

Authors

Scott L. Rogers

Scott L. Rogers is a nationally recognized leader in the area of mindfulness and law, as well as a teacher, researcher, and trainer. He is founder and director of the University of Miami School of Law’s Mindfulness in Law Program, and he co-founded and co-directs the University of Miami’s Mindfulness Research & Practice Initiative. Scott is the author of five books including the recently released *The Elements of Mindfulness.*
Mindfulness 101: The Paradox and Promise of Solitude at a Time of Social Distancing

By Scott L. Rogers

In today's column we explore the subject of solitude and its importance to the quality of our well-being and life's work. The form of solitude that I will share departs from conventional thinking for there is little trace of it when curled up on a couch reading a good book or taking a walk outdoors listening to a podcast. It's the kind of solitude you can experience in a house full of people, the kind that patiently follows you wherever you go. After providing some background and resources, clarifying the term, and explaining why it matters, I'll share with you what I refer to as "mindful solitude," which offers a broader perspective on ways to understand and practice mindfulness.
As mindfulness has become more richly infused into the fabric of the legal profession, a shift is taking place from a primary focus on the lawyer and members of the legal profession to the broader relational context to include clients and parties to a dispute. Such a shift raises interesting and important questions about the role of lawyers and of the profession itself, and may hold the promise for further enriching the effective resolution of disputes, taking into account both the utility and responsiveness of legal solutions and the wellbeing of participants to a dispute.

Two examples can be found here in Florida. Three years after the law firm Berger Singerman offered a mindfulness training program to its team members in 2013, it offered a follow up mindfulness training for the firm’s team members and representatives of its clients. More recently, Paul Singerman has been invited to speak with lawyers and judges about the importance of client mental health and well-being and the role attorneys can play as part of their responsibility to offer comprehensive and competent legal representation. Mediator Patrick Russell, an attorney with Lydecker Diaz, has been integrating short mindfulness insights and practice moments in some of the mediations he conducts. He reports that the parties appreciate the periods for a structured pause and find the proceedings to be more focused and productive. Both Singerman and Russell have been practicing mindfulness for many years and explore these questions and share these practices from their own direct experience.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

The August 2019 “The Mindful Lawyer” column addressed a paradox in which lawyers, charged with helping to shine the light of insight and awareness on legal matters to meaningfully resolve conflicts and help support a more orderly and less agitated society are finding themselves increasingly agitated and in search of greater stability, personally and professionally. Given the widening scope of the role of mindfulness and those with whom it may be shared, this column takes a quick look at some of the primary drivers of human behavior and their influence on the lawyer-client relationship. In doing so, it invites us to reflect on the role of mindfulness — and a host of other approaches to well-
being and resilience — in helping the lawyer establish a steady foundation upon which to be of assistance to the client across a variety of domains in keeping with our role of counselor at law.

THE CLIENT

Clients become clients because they need our assistance, often amid circumstances of conflict and high emotion. A careful examination of the typical client under such circumstances reveals a pattern that can be helpful to reflect on: (1) they want something; (2) they are emotionally agitated; and (3) they are confused. While this is by no means the case with every client and cause, you likely need not look far to find a client and cause in which these conditions are met. Usually, clients want things like money, revenge, and justice. They may want to be heard, to have a role to play, to matter. And sometimes, they simply want an apology. Because they do not have what they want, and because pursuing it can be challenging, emotions run high and include anger, frustration, hopelessness, grief, loneliness, doubt, fear, and anxiety. And because clients rarely know all of the facts, rarely appreciate all perspectives, and rarely have access to the whole truth — or are unable to hear it, there is often confusion. Add to this confusion the ongoing state of wanting and emotional agitation, and the confusion grows, which in turn grows the agitation and the wanting. To find relief amid this intense and highly charged cycle, the client looks to you.

THE COUNSELOR AT LAW

Some of the stress and intensity of practicing law — inherently a helping profession — comes from the emotional contagion of helping clients who are suffering in some of the ways explored above. Along their wants is for you to solve their problems, fix their mess, and be there for them when they call... or email or text or show up at your office. Moreover, their wanting, emotional agitation, and confusion are not the result of their being a client, but of their being a human being. Lawyers too are human beings. And what do we want? We want to be helpful and to win, fix, and resolve. We want to be trusted to do our job. And when we run into high demand and conflict, we can become angry, frustrated, sad, and feel alone, afraid, doubtful, anxious — and fatigued. And, notwithstanding our keen intellect and good intentions, we can become confused and make decisions and act in ways that are not always as helpful as we intended at the time.

MINDFULNESS
Some of the attributes of a mindful lawyer — which we all possess from time to time — is a subject matter expertise coupled with qualities such as wisdom, focus, effective communication, empathy, patience, compassion, resolve, resilience, and the wholehearted embrace of the client and its cause. We each have our own complementary set of attributes, and you can modify this list to represent those ideals you aspire to model and the tone you wish to set and maintain throughout client representation. Of course, as aspirations, we will time and again, fall short in meeting them. Some of the reasons for this include the stuff of our own lives, the intensity of the workload, and the personalities with whom we interact.

The practice of mindfulness — the many forms it can take and its relationship to emotional intelligence, self-compassion, and self-care — is the primary subject of “The Mindful Lawyer” column and of a growing number of articles published in local, state, and national bar journals. These articles offer lawyers additional tools and insights to help them see more clearly what is arising during challenging times — often momentary states of wanting, emotional agitation, and confusion — so as to more skillfully navigate this terrain, in terms of their personal well-being and professional excellence. As counselors at law, we are looked to by our clients for help when they are in the worst of states, and we are not immune from feeling their pain, and being drawn into their dramas. It can be helpful to reflect, from time to time, on the wanting, emotional agitation, and confusion that our clients may be experiencing, just as it can be helpful to shine that light of awareness onto ourselves. To be a lawyer is to manage not only the challenges of our own busy and stressful life, but also the added layer of complexity brought on by our clients in need.

Many professionals grapple with burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue, and lawyers are no exception. Nor are our clients, who have their own professional and personal lives, which often are the foundation of their need for our help. And, like all helping professions, there are many ways we can be of service. As more lawyers appreciate the benefits of the study and practice of mindfulness, they will be increasingly likely to share them with others. To be self aware, empathic, and attuned to our client’s needs carries with it the heightened responsibility to be able to offer assistance across a larger domain of concern. How we do this is for each of us to decide for ourselves. That we examine this question may be more crucial now than ever, and attending to it wisely may be helpful not only to our clients, but ourselves. After all, we are all in this together.
If you have a question about mindfulness and integrating it into the practice of law that you would like answered in this column, send it to srogers@law.miami.edu.

Scott Rogers, M.S., J.D., is a nationally recognized leader in the area of mindfulness in law and founded and directs the University of Miami School of Law’s Mindfulness in Law Program where he teaches mindful ethics, mindful leadership, and mindfulness in law. He is the creator of Jurisight, one of the first CLE programs in the country to integrate mindfulness and neuroscience and conducts workshops and presentations on the role of mindfulness in legal education and across the legal profession. He is author of the recently released, “The Elements of Mindfulness.”