

# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## MINDFULNESS AS A PATH TO TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR LIFE

Do you ever have the feeling that the world is out to get you? Have you ever experienced a time in your life when nothing seems to go right and even the mundane tasks are a struggle? If so, you are not alone.

Peter is just such a person. On one particular day, things just seem to go wrong from his first moment in the office. Peter walks in the door, his arms full of paperwork, and his secretary hands him a fistful of “urgent” messages from clients. He spills coffee on his shirt trying to set the paperwork on his desk, fields a phone call from an angry client, throws on a suit jacket, and then grabs a file on his way out the door - already running late for a court hearing. He walks outside and steps in a puddle of water, drives to the courthouse only to find no parking, and finally gets through security after having to remove his shoes, belt, and jacket - exposing his coffee-soaked shirt to all who must surely be watching his struggles to make it to the courtroom. On his arrival, he finds that the judge is holding an unanticipated meeting in chambers. He dutifully sits and waits for over an hour - valuable time he could be using to work on his ever-growing pile of case files. He then rushes back to the office to catch up on his paperwork backlog, greeted by another bunch of angry messages. He meets with a client, all the while wondering when he will have time to get to the brief that is due by 5:00 p.m. Peter works through lunch to finalize his brief and leaves for home, arms full of files, to have dinner with his family before pulling an all-nighter at his home office.

If Peter takes even the tiniest of moments to breathe, he may begin to wonder, “Is this really what I signed up for when I went to law school? The constant pressure of deadlines, demanding clients, ridiculous court schedules, family pressures, and never a moment to myself?” Peter doesn’t eat right; he doesn’t sleep much; he doesn’t have time for exercise, hobbies, and often even his family. Peter may feel helpless, a slave to his obligations, his clients, his bills, and the lifestyle to which his family has become accustomed. He may even secretly wish for a miracle to whisk him away. Absent winning the lottery or finding a genie in a lamp, what is Peter to do? What are you to do?

If you are asking yourself this question, you are not alone. As many as 30% of Oregon lawyers have reported that they would not become a lawyer if they had it to do all over again. How can so many people who enter the profession become so disillusioned? Possibly something more is going on than just a poor career choice. Taking a few moments to pause and reflect might help Peter – and you – find another way.

### The Path to Mindfulness

**1. Recognize where you are in relation to the direction you want to go.** Where do you focus your attention? As a lawyer, you have been trained to imagine the possibilities and often the worst-case scenarios. If you focus on the negative – what you do not want to happen – it often will lead to frustration and disappointment. Instead, focus on the positive aspects of any given situation – what you

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want to experience – creating clear goals you can move toward. For example, instead of worrying about the impression of his stained shirt, Peter could remind himself that he is helping his client and could think about what objectives he would like to achieve when he advocates for the client. Reflecting on the positive aspects of what he is already doing could help Peter keep the day's stresses in perspective. It could also point him in the direction he wants to go.

**2. Imagine yourself having already attained that goal.** Once you start focusing on the positive, try imagining the outcome you would like to achieve. What are you thinking, saying, and doing? How are you acting? How are you presenting yourself? Peter seems to be constantly playing catch-up with his schedule, yet there are many things in his day that are under his control. Rather than rushing around, Peter may want to have more time to accomplish things and feel more in charge of his day. If Peter starts by picturing himself getting to court on time with a clean shirt and finishing his brief, the steps he needs to take may become more apparent.

**3. Recognize that you have the power to achieve your goals.** Let's say that Peter has imagined himself being in charge of his schedule. What did he see when his day went according to plan? Perhaps he saw himself staying home a little longer to enjoy his coffee while reading the paper, then going straight to court with the case file he brought home with him the night before. Maybe he even anticipated that court could require a lot of waiting, and he brought his notes so he could work on the brief due later that day while he waited. By simply paying attention to and focusing on what Peter wants, he already knows what he needs to do to have more control of his day.

**4. Tap into that state of mind and focus on your goal.** You know what you want. You know that you have the power to achieve it. Now you just need to focus on that goal and then take the actions that will allow it to unfold naturally. Focusing on what you do not want often produces exactly what you don't want. So give priority to what you do want and then make changes to accommodate it. Peter, for example, could get up early, read the paper, and enjoy his coffee before heading straight to court. He could block out time for writing his brief and reschedule that client for the day *after* his brief is due.

**5. Let whatever happens be okay.** Finally, you will likely experience some disappointments even when you focus on what you want. While focusing on your destination, try to remain detached from the outcome and learn to appreciate the journey. Let whatever happens be okay and enjoy the ride!

You have control over what you choose to focus on. By practicing mindfulness and changing your point of focus, you can dramatically change your experience of life. Whenever you find yourself feeling like a victim to circumstance, remember to focus on the positive and keep taking steps toward what you want to achieve. Eventually, focusing on what you want will become easier with practice. The more you practice, the more you will find yourself changing not only your day, but your life.

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