

BACK STORY

CAN MEDITATION MAKE YOU A BETTER LAWYER?

BY MICHAEL SAUNDERS, ESQ.

“Meditation practice awakens our trust that the wisdom and compassion that we need are already within us.”

– Pema Chodron, from “Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living.”

This probably goes without saying, but practicing law is stressful. A lawyer must contend with the demands of clients, opposing counsel, the billable hour, innumerable deadlines and the list goes on and on. Of course, we will never be completely free from the stress in our busy lives. Thus, we must develop methods to manage stress. Meditation is one such method. Not only can meditation help ease the stress in your life, it can even make you a better lawyer.

Generally speaking, meditation consists of observing one’s thoughts and emotions, one’s mental “weather.” When meditating, the meditator simply becomes aware of his or her thoughts and emotions and lets them go by as if they were passing clouds. Meditation helps in the development of a space of awareness between one’s thoughts and emotions and one’s reaction to those thoughts and emotions. In other words, a skilled meditator is able to avoid making one’s thoughts and emotions too solid, and can avoid being hooked by those thoughts and emotions and reacting negatively.

When you think of meditation, you may envision a Buddhist monk sitting cross-legged in a lotus position chanting mantras. Although meditation has its origins in religious traditions, there is no necessity to identify with any single belief system in order to reap the benefits of meditation. And, although a seated position is probably ideal for meditation, meditation need not be done while sitting. For example, when one is standing in line



somewhere one can, instead of becoming impatient, engage in meditation in order to calm the mind.

Of course, the benefits of meditation are many. Most importantly, meditation can help calm and relax your mind. With a calm mind, you will be more creative, have

greater clarity of thought and have a sense of mental balance and peace. Additionally, a calm mind will allow you to be able to better deal with the seemingly never-ending distractions within your field of awareness.

The benefits of meditation are particularly helpful to lawyers, since, as lawyers, we rely on clear thinking to provide guidance to our clients. A lawyer with a regular meditation practice will be a

confident, calm, collected and concentrated legal practitioner. Additionally, such a lawyer-meditator will be better able to perform work more productively.

Although learning meditation from a trained practitioner in a group setting is probably the ideal, one can also develop a meditation practice on one’s own. If going the self-study route, I would personally recommend the books and audio CDs of Pema Chodron, an American Tibetan Buddhist nun who has taught meditation for decades around the world.

Meditation has helped improve the skills of professional golfers, Special Forces soldiers, Phil Jackson’s Lakers and it can help lawyers too. If you are skeptical of meditation’s efficacy, I would invite you to give it a try. I believe that you will be pleasantly surprised. ■

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