



COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Do You Have Decision Fatigue?

*"We are free to choose our paths, but we can't choose the consequences that come from them."
~ Sean Convey*

We equate freedom with choice. The problem, as Barry Schwartz discusses in his book "The Paradox of Choice," is that having too many choices throughout the day can cause "analysis paralysis," anxiety, and depression. How many decisions do you make in a day? Just on the way to work, you probably make hundreds of small decisions before you arrive at your destination. We can make thousands more while shopping, at work, at home, with health care or retirement options. Imagine walking into a grocery store: we are bombarded with choices to make; have you noticed just how large the cereal aisle is? Practicing law is a profession wherein one is constantly making decisions, including providing choices to clients as we problem solve for them.

Every time we are forced to make a decision, our attention is needed and our energy drains a little bit. In addition, with so many options to choose from in our daily lives (some big, some small), we run the risk of making the "wrong" decision. Some people agonize over whether they chose correctly, which then produces anxiety. We set higher expectations for ourselves when there are so many options to choose from and, sometimes wrongly, assume that the options we didn't choose might have been better; a combination of "keeping up with the Joneses" and "the grass is greener on the other side."

For example, while you are doing one thing, such as working, are you thinking about other things you could be doing, like playing golf or spending time with your family? While you are with your family, are you thinking about what you "should" be doing for work? Or do you compare yourself to others and assume they have it better than you because of their decisions? Or, alternatively, do you feel exhausted at the end of the day and couldn't make another decision if your life depended on it?

One way to minimize decision fatigue is to simplify your life: make to-do lists and stick to them throughout the day; eat the same breakfast every morning; write out a list of options and do a pros and cons list to simplify decision making; create a routine when you come into the office or go home; choose what show you want to watch before you turn on the TV so you don't channel surf for an hour; limit the time you are looking at and responding to texts/emails/phone calls, etc. Another way to minimize decision fatigue is to focus on the present moment rather than thinking about the past or future. Perseverating on what has happened, or being anxious about what could happen, drains a tremendous amount of mental

and physical energy. Take a deep breath, and pay attention to what is in front of you one moment at a time.

We live in a world with many choices, and that isn't always a good thing. If you can limit the amount of decisions you make in a day, you can reduce anxiety, depression and "analysis paralysis." Start by creating a list of ways you could simplify your life. Choose one and put it into action today. Notice how making small lifestyle changes can help your stress management and improve your self-care!

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