



COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Simple Strategies for Self-Care

When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be. ~ Lao Tzu.

What sort of negative or unreasonable limitations do you impose on yourself that prevent you from being happy, content, and joyful? Often, law students blame their lack of self-care on their busy, stressful schedules. In a law-based society, however, the expectations, duties, and responsibilities placed on officers of the court can be overwhelming. Research shows that when we aren't taking care of ourselves, our professional life suffers and can be severely jeopardized. As a law student, you can preempt that potential by learning how to take care of yourself NOW. Learning the skills to take care of yourself when experiencing academic stressors and pressures will transfer to bar exam preparation and then into the practice of law. Self-care is not optional; it is essential. Below are some tips for "cleaning up" those habits that keep you from feeling your best:

1. Produce more serotonin. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that produces relaxation and calm, amongst other things. Research has found that individuals who produce more serotonin have higher social status than those who produce less. Individuals who know how to self-soothe themselves, who handle their emotions in a mature and mindful way, have a greater impact on their environment and naturally produce more serotonin.
2. Be yourself. First, we have to know who we are, and then we have to be dedicated to speaking and behaving in ways that align with that self. When we aren't able to speak or behave in authentic ways because we fear retaliation from the "other" in some way, resentment and self-pity can result. It takes a lot of energy to suppress your ideas or your true personality, and to wear different masks to please (or confront) those around you. That is an unnecessary drain on your energy.
3. Don't compare yourself to others. We all learned how to speak and behave by watching those around us. As adults, we no longer need to compare ourselves to others. Be who you *want* to be, not who you were *taught* to be.
4. Change your opinion of vulnerability. Being vulnerable is a strength, as is asking for help when we need it. Most emotions can be rationalized or argued away, but those who have inner strength allow themselves to feel their emotions, process them, and then use them as motivation for change. Be honest about how you are feeling.
5. Appreciate yourself. Many of us were taught that to appreciate ourselves was vain and modesty was admirable. This tendency can cause us to behave as if other people's needs are more important than our own. Supporting others at our own expense can leave us feeling like a martyr; alternatively, behaving like a narcissist to

mask low self-esteem and a lack of self-worth will also leave us feeling hollow. Either way, whether it is the “martyr” or the “narcissist,” both extremes reflect a lack of self-worth. It’s time to improve your opinion of you and those around you. Let go of judgment, jealousy, and self-deprivation.

6. Create quiet time for yourself. If you are used to being “plugged-in” 24/7 with your electronic devices, reading for assignments, or attending to other people’s needs, the time, energy, and focus is draining. You need time every day during which you can relax, and not respond to anything from the external world.

Your mind and body will reward you for tending to yourself so that you aren’t always “running on empty,” resulting in a better quality of life. Choose at least one or two self-care ideas above and start working on them today!

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April 2015
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