



Photo by Tonik on Unsplash

Top 10 Complaints About “Pandemic Living”

BY ANITA CARONNA M.S.Ed., LPC

We continue to experience daily adjustments to our lives and ongoing management of fear, anger, worry and doubt. Below are the most commonly reported challenges that judges, lawyers, and legal professionals have expressed over the past few months. Try a few of the tips below to proactively cope with the complexities of our current paradigm:

1. Exhaustion and sleeplessness:

There are several biological and psychological reasons many of us have been navigating waves of fatigue during the day, and yet can't get enough sleep at night. High stress levels deplete our brain and body quickly, and also keep us up at night. There is no quick fix, but a 20-minute power nap has big benefits, so fit one in when you can. Stay hydrated, laugh more, get fresh air, expose yourself to appropriate amounts of sunlight, and keep moving throughout the day to create neurotransmitters, chemicals, and hormones that will give you more energy and help you sleep better at night.

2. Disorientation and Groundhog Day effect:

Most of us are suffering cognitive impacts from the current circumstances, also known as “pandemic brain,” information overload, and analysis paralysis. Remember: stress makes us all stupid and clumsy! The best thing to do is create a solid weekly schedule, a daily to-do list, and plan breaks during the day. Have fun during your work breaks and go easy on yourself if you find that you need to re-read things a few times to comprehend them, or if it feels as if your vocabulary has taken a temporary vacation. Take things slower than usual and be more thoughtful. If you are seriously concerned, reach out for assistance.

3. Difficulty with virtual platforms and “24/7 technology”:

We have learned to utilize virtual platforms relatively quickly, requiring physical senses and business practices to assimilate to a different way of connecting with others. The amount of troubleshooting, creative problem solving, and new policies/procedures required to adjust can seem never ending. In addition, “zoom exhaustion” is very real. On-line platforms trigger a unique challenge for our mirror neurons and our “fight/flight” process neurologically. Bottom line: it will take time to acclimate to these new methods, and possibly as long to appreciate them. When possible, switch back to using the telephone to communicate on-one-one with others. Commit yourself to a growth mindset and be open to take the initiative in learning through colleagues, friends, free on-line classes, or with mentors.

4. Spending too much time working:

“Work-Life Balance” has become “Work-Life Integration.” Boundaries and separation between “home” and “work” are crucial, but don’t have to be all or nothing. Doing the dishes or the laundry during breaks during the day might help keep you sane and give you more time to rest at the end of the day. Alternatively, you might want to shift your work hours to accommodate your chores and personal obligations; try doing your work during hours you are most productive. If you can’t put it down at the end of your work shift, make a daily work schedule and set an alarm to remind you when it’s time to stop working. Plan a walk with a friend at the end of the day or take the dog for a walk to mark the end of the workday.

5. Workplace stressors:

Re-entry into the workplace creates its own unique stressors, and everyone reacts differently to them. Be patient with others, take the time to clarify messages, and be open to the possibility of changing roles within a team. Cultivate clear, direct, and compassionate communication channels and seek opportunities to build professional relationships. It would be ideal for the leadership/management team to check-in often with the team, as well as for colleagues to reach out to check-in with each other periodically. Keep the lines of communication open and don’t let misunderstandings escalate!

6. Focusing Issues:

This can include hyper focusing, procrastination, or an inability to focus, causing issues with anxiety, fear, and perfectionism. If you are struggling with being able to focus, you are not alone. Be open to developing new skills and habits by developing new neuropathways, and envision being calm in a storm, or as an anchor in the ocean. Discover the opportunity to get to know yourself better, how you learn, and how your brain works. Try classes, support groups, TedTalks, or speaking with a professional coach or counselor. Also, try closing email and putting your phone on silence when you need to focus on a project; just remember to turn them back on when you are done!

7. Imposter Syndrome & perfectionism:

Many judges and lawyers who were “on top of their game” before the pandemic are now reporting feelings of frustration and inadequacy. The practice of law has changed dramatically in the past few months. Reach out to others personally and professionally. Look into professional support groups, professional coaching or counseling. Be open to taking an online class to update skills if necessary. Be patient with yourself and others; it takes time to train the brain into new habits.

wellbeing

8. Using alcohol, drugs, food, or other forms of self-medicating:

During stressful times, maladaptive coping mechanisms can be easy to justify and, unfortunately, may easily become a habit or even an addiction. If your habits are negatively impacting your personal or professional well-being, now is the time to increase healthy routines like physical activity, good nutrition, sleep, and a balanced schedule. If negative habits have developed or are becoming problematic, there is professional and peer support available. Contact COLAP for a confidential consultation to find out more, or for tips on improving your well-being in general.

9. Relationship and career issues:

Being cooped-up, experiencing feeling of grief, or fear of illness or financial concerns can cause any of us to feel cranky and ultimately experience varying levels of anxiety and depression. Many lawyers are also trying to cope with the loss of aspects of their work that brought them the most joy, particularly litigators. Before making drastic changes in your relationships or your career, please be sure to speak with trusted and neutral allies, including counselors, coaches, or our COLAP team.

10. Feeling overwhelmed by changes:

Change is everywhere; it is the only constant right now, and it is stressful. To activate the part of our brain in charge of executive functioning, creativity, and compassion, it is necessary to slow down and breathe deeply often. Spend more time focusing on your relationships with loved ones, friends, and trusted colleagues than on problems or situations you cannot control. Limit exposure to social media and “24/7 news cycles.” Another way to cope is to recognize that your thoughts, feelings, and emotions are fluid. We are all experiencing a “rollercoaster effect.” Acknowledge your uncomfortable feelings and allow them to pass so that you don’t become emotionally overloaded. Find trusted colleagues, friends, family, or professionals to chat with to process your feelings proactively. Lastly, become part of a positive change. Whether your support is for social justice reform, pandemic relief, or engaging in other pro bono opportunities. Reach out to the Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP) or COLAP for a list of resources. ●

For suggestions on implementing the Tips above, a confidential consultation and discussion about your stressors, helpful resources, or to schedule a free well-being webinar for a legal workplace or organization (ethics CLE credit), contact your Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program: 303-986-3345 or info@coloradolap.org. *All calls and emails are confidential* For more info: www.coloradolap.org