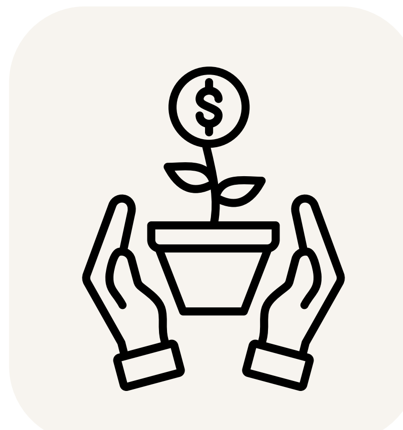
Thriving in the Practice of Law

Mindfulness and Financial Strategies for a Sustainable Legal Career



Sidebar advisors partnered with Courtney Schulnick, a former attorney and mindfulness teacher, to bring attention to the stress and pressure attorneys face as well as to provide a practical resource for busy attorneys to manage it more intentionally.

Why Attorneys Experience So Much Stress

The legal profession is demanding by design. Common sources of stress generally include:

Deadlines

Tight timelines create constant pressure and high stakes

Heavy Workloads

High volume and long hours lead to mental and physical exhaustion.

Uncertainty

Unpredictable outcomes makes it hard to relax or detatch.

Always-on Culture

Technology keeps us connected 24/7, causing blurred boundaries.

Caregiving

Supporting children, partners, or aging parents adds another layer of pressure and stress

Financial Pressure

High incomes can come with high expectations - and financial complexity.

Over time, an attorney can become so accustomed to operating under pressure that stress begins to feel normal. The body and mind may remain in a heightened state even when an immediate threat is no longer present.

The Professional Cost of Stress

Chronic stress does not always appear as a dramatic breakdown. It may show up gradually through:

- Reduced focus and attention to detail
- Emotional reactivity
- Decision fatigue
- Careless or avoidable mistakes
- Difficulty communicating effectively
- Decreased resilience
- Physical exhaustion
- Burnout or disengagement from work

These effects may influence more than your immediate wellbeing. They may also affect your professional reputation, relationships, career longevity, and long-term earning potential.

The information on this page is provided for general educational purposes only and is intended to offer general information regarding stress and well-being. It is not intended as medical, psychological, or therapeutic advice. show less

Understanding Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the intentional practice of being present and aware - on purpose, and without judgement. It helps you step off autopioot, respond with choice and cultivate clarity.

Six easy mindfulness practices to reset, refocus, and respond with intention:

1 Relaxing Sigh

What it is

Take a double inhale through the nose, followed by a long exhale through the mouth.

When to use it

Anytime you feel a spike in stress or tension.

Why it helps

It can help activate the body's calming response and create a brief pause before you react.

2 Soles of The Feet

What it is

Bring your attention to the sensation of your feet making contact with the ground.

When to use it

When you feel scattered, overwhelmed or rushed.

Why it helps

It grounds your attention in the present moment and provides a steady physical point of focus.

3 Mindful Walking

What it is

Slow your pace and notice the physical sensations of walking, including your steps, posture, and surroundings.

When to use it

Between meetings, during breaks, or in between tasks.

Why it helps

Creates a mental reset and can help you return to tasks with greater awareness.

4 Triangle of Awareness

What it is

Expand your awareness to three areas: yourself, the people around you, and the space you are in.

When to use it

When you feel stuck in your head, emotionally reactive, or disconnected from the situation around you.

Why it helps

It broadens your perspective and helps you notice more than your immediate thoughts or emotions.

5 Box Breathing

What it is

Inhale, hold, exhale, and pause, using a count of four for each step.

When to use it

Before a high-pressure meeting, presentation, conversation, or other stressful moment.

Why it helps

The structured count gives your attention a clear focal point and may help calm a racing mind.

6 Brief Body Scan

What it is

Mentally scan your body, noticing areas of tension without judging or immediately trying to change them.

When to use it

At the end of the day, midday or after a long period of focused work.

Why it helps

Helps you recognize physical signs of stress, and release tension intentionally.

Know What You Are Working Toward

Attorneys can spend years working longer hours and pursuing higher compensation without pausing to determine how much income their actual goals require.

Professional ambition is not inherently unhealthy. The problem arises when the additional work no longer supports a clearly defined purpose.

Ask Yourself:

- What does my family need from me financially?
- What does my family need from me personally?
- Does additional income *really* add to financial security?
- Which expenses genuinely improved life versus simply grew alongside income.
- What level of work is sustainable for my health and relationships?
- What would greater financial flexibility allow me to change?
- If my biggest financial goals are already funded, what is the additional income really buying me?

Many attorneys assume every raise, bonus, or promotion represents financial progress. Once your major financial goals are funded, ask yourself: Who am I doing this for? The best career decisions are intentional ones.

Financial Planner Perspective

Small financial habits can create greater flexibility, reduce unnecessary pressure, and support a more sustainable career.

Avoid the Trap of Grinding for No Reason

Attorneys may continue taking on longer hours and additional responsibilities simply because the opportunity exists.

Without a clear understanding of what your lifestyle and long-term goals actually require, it can be easy to keep pushing without knowing what you are working toward.

Define what success looks like for you and your family, then consider whether your current pace supports that vision.

Automate Savings: Pay Yourself First

Most people deposit income into checking and save what's left.

Consider reversing the process: deposit income into savings first, then automatically transfer a set amount into checking for planned expenses.

This may help reduce increasing lifestyle spending.

Once you've built an appropriate cash reserve, excess savings can be redirected toward retirement, investments, education, or other long-term goals.

Plan Ahead for the Possibility of Caring for an Aging Parent

As attorneys there can be an unspoken expectation to provide financial support for aging parents because they earn a high income.

Imagine paying for one child's college because they didn't qualify for aid. Then a parent suddenly needs long-term care. Now you have to decide whether to pay for nursing care, ask your second child to take student loans, reduce retirement savings, or make other financial sacrifices.

Those decisions can create difficult tradeoffs, place strain on marriages and family relationships, and even affect career demands like billable hours.

Having these conversations before a crisis can help set expectations, identify available resources.

Align Income With Your Lifestyle and Family Goals

Higher income should create more freedom—not simply larger monthly obligations.

As your income grows, it's easy for spending to grow alongside it, making a higher paycheck feel necessary just to maintain your lifestyle.

Financial planning helps you understand what your goals actually require, so you can determine when additional earnings are improving your life versus simply supporting a more expensive lifestyle.

High performance should support your life, not consume it.

Mindfulness and financial planning can work together to support your career and life.

About SideBar Advisors

Financial planning for attorneys and their families, designed to align financial decisions with personal values, long-term goals, and greater flexibility.

Learn more at sidebaradvisors.com.

About Courtney Schulnick

Former attorney and mindfulness teacher helping legal professionals reduce stress, cultivate clarity, and build more sustainable careers.

Learn more at courtneyschulnick.com.

SIDEBAR ADVISORS

Courtney Schulnick Mindfulness

Schedule your introductory consultation today.

This brochure was developed as a companion resource to an educational webinar presented by Niraj Chhabra and Courtney Schulnick. Courtney Schulnick contributed to the mindfulness content included in this brochure. Courtney Schulnick is not affiliated with Mariner Platform Solutions (MPS) or Sidebar Advisors. References to Ms. Schulnick are provided for educational attribution only and should not be construed as an endorsement or recommendation of any person or entity or their respective services.

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