2017 Solo & Small Firm Conference

Stress Management for Lawyers

May 18 & 19, 2017
Basin Harbor Club
Vergennes, VT

Speaker:
John O'Brien, PhD
Stress Management for Attorneys

Objectives:
By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:
1. identify sources of general life stress as well as the specific stressors from work as an attorney.
2. discuss the physiological changes that occur as stress levels increase.
3. implement practical skills for managing stress effectively.

A. Stress defined
“Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it.”
Selye (1974)
“Any change that we must adapt to.”

- Distress: reaction to a negative change
- Eustress: reaction to a positive change
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A. Stress defined
• Anticipatory stress: stress that comes from worry thoughts over the future
• Situational stress: the stress of the moment
• Chronic stress: the stress that builds up over time with some ongoing difficulty
• Residual stress: the stress over past hurts

Yerkes-Dodson Law: performance is best when stress levels (arousal) are moderate

Take-away: Stress can HELP us if we know how to harness it effectively.

Why is it important to understand and manage stress? Poor stress management leads to:
- Unprofessional/unhealthy behavior
- Office conflicts
- Legal errors
- Ethics violations
- Malpractice claims
- Substance abuse
- Depression/Anxiety/Suicide
A. Stress defined

“the most common experiences that contributed to stress among people with “a great deal of stress in the last month”:  
- money (61%)  
- work (58%)  
- economy (50%).

APA (2017)

Stressors for Attorneys (Top 10)

1. High stress  
2. Long hours  
3. Job dissatisfaction  
4. Soaring Law School Debt  
5. Competitive Job Market

(Kane, 2017)

Stressors for Attorneys (Top 10)

6. Client pressures  
7. Changing Legal Paradigms  
8. Technology  
9. Legal Process outsourcing  
10. Poor Public Image

(Kane, 2017)
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A. Stress defined
Attorneys and sources of stress:
1. Time pressure/work overload
2. Competition and financial pressure
3. Difficult people
4. Adversary system
5. Legal role conflicts
6. Areas of practice
7. Isolation
8. Personal variables

B. Stress Response Biology of stress
General Adaptation Syndrome
Alarm Stage
  - Fight/Flight/Freeze/Submit
  - Tend/Befriend
Resistance
Exhaustion

C. Physiological changes that occur under stress
Neuronal cognitive response
  - Neocortex
  - Limbic system
  - Amygdala
  - Hippocampus

Seward (2015)
Siwick (2011)
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C: Physiological changes that occur under stress

Hormonal response

HPA Axis

Adrenaline/Noradrenaline

Cortisol

Stress-response

Stomach

Glucocorticoids

Source: Seward (2015)

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D: Assessing Stress

50 common signs and symptoms of stress

Consult the list in your packet. Do you see yourself in any of these symptoms?

Source: American Institute of Stress

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D: Assessing Stress

Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale: Scoring

☑ Less than 150: low susceptibility

☑ 150-300: 50% chance of major health issue in the next two years

☑ 300+: 80% chance of major health issue in the next two years

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E. Coaching for Stress Management

Different from:

- Training
- Consulting
- Psychotherapy

How to choose a coach or other professional?

- Referral/reputation
- Expertise and training
- Location/access
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F: Skill: Abdominal breathing
Information:
http://www.amsa.org/healingthehealer/breathing.cfm
Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1pdZnKrQDM

G: Nutrition
Food recommendations:
Please see the enclosed handout and general guidelines.

More information can be obtained at:
http://www.choosemyplate.gov/about.html

[Mindless Eating Myth 1: People Know How Much They Want to Eat (and drink)]

[Mindless Eating Myth 2: People Know when They are Full (had enough to drink)]
(Wansink, 2009).
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H: Sleep hygiene:
- Sleep recommendations
  - Adults (18-64): 7-9 hours
  - Adults (65+): 7-8 hours

Source: National Sleep Foundation
http://sleepfoundation.org/how-sleep-works/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need

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H: Sleep hygiene:
- Avoid napping
- Avoid stimulants
- Exercise
- Food choices
- Ensure adequate exposure to natural light.
- Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine.
- Associate your bed with sleep

National Sleep Foundation

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I: Relaxation response
“Your personal ability to encourage your body to release chemicals and brain signals that make your muscles and organs slow down and increase blood flow to the brain.”

Benson (2001)
J: Aerobic exercise

- Notice the exercise recommendations on your handout.
- Compare your exercise with these guidelines.
- Consider whether you need to adjust your weekly exercise to meet these guidelines.
- Interval training and the brain

K: Mindfulness

- Mindfulness: paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally. (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)
- Mindfulness: a form of awareness and attention that enables us to peer into the truth of this moment. (Altman, 2011)
Balanced Living for Attorneys: A primer

L. Perception:

Beck’s Cognitive Model: sees the mind as an information processing system.

Automatic Thoughts: thoughts that come to mind when we are on auto-pilot.

Problematic patterns can develop and manifest reflexively in situations, especially stressful ones.

Herman and Reinke (2015)

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Balanced Living for Attorneys: A primer

L. Perception: Problematic thoughts patterns:

• All-or-Nothing thinking/Overgeneralization: thoughts that include always and never

• Moralization: thoughts that include should

• Catastrophizing: thoughts that include awful/terrible when these are exaggerations of what is happening

• Personalization: interpreting an event as directed at us

• Mind reading: we assume that we know why people are acting a certain way

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M: Social Support

Benefits:

- Improved immune system function/fewer colds/flu and less chronic illness
- Lowered blood pressure and better cardiovascular function
- Lower rates of disease and death

Seward (2015)
N. Skill: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

The CALM Exercise
Chest: Chest/torso sinks back into the chair
Arms: Shoulders and arms sag, hands rest in lap
Legs: Loose and flexible, not crossed
Mouth: Jaw drops slightly

(Robinson & Reiter, 2007)
Thank you for coming!

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References


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References

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