

BE WELL

The Benefits of Mindful Practices are Profound, But Only if You Actually Do Them...

In 2009 I left the practice of complex commercial litigation. I was overwhelmed, stressed, and utilizing coping mechanisms that were not sustainable: endurance events, followed by binge drinking, followed by bad decisions, and repeat. At that time my perspective was that it was the practice of law that was not sustainable, and I needed to find something less stressful. It is similar to the perspective that a current location or job is too stressful and moving will make everything better. The only problem with this way of thinking is that we always take our minds with us. To a new job. A new location. An entirely new profession. But, those aspects are just the backdrop for our ongoing perspectives. The shift that really needs to happen is our actual mindset or perspective. Simple to see, but much harder or impossible to implement.

For me, the alternate professional path I chose was to become a therapeutic yoga teacher, which included a meditation aspect, which I initially thought was a waste of time. Also, my focus for the yoga teacher training was to heal my physical body so I could help others do the same. Then, I realized that this mindful movement practice was actually healing my mind and shifting my perspective. Things appeared brighter with more clarity. It was as if the world became multi-dimensional, after only being one or two-dimensional. I realized that it might be possible to return to the practice of law, but in a more mindful way. This led me to the path of a public servant for the State of Vermont, Department of Chil-

dren and Families where I have been able to share my legal skills to engage in regulatory compliance for technology projects. Something I didn't even know existed as a legal path option in 2009 when I left my litigation job. I realized that incorporating the benefits of a dedicated mindful practice enabled me to be a healthier and happier version of a lawyer. As a passionate teacher, I knew that I had to share my insights and shifts in perspective with other lawyers and stressed professionals. So, in 2016 I started on the path of becoming a mindfulness instructor and the Vermont Bar Association has supported me every step of the way, which led to this quarterly Be Well article submission.

I want to outline some of the incredible benefits of engaging in mindful practices and emphasize the one benefit that inspires me to donate my time to support others. Overall, being mindful acts as a brake for your automatic survival and protective system, your sympathetic nervous system, which is your fight/flight/freeze/faint reaction. Once this braking device is activated, your relaxation response can be stimulated, which is your parasympathetic nervous system, which is your rest/digest/heal response. The benefits are many:

• Improved Mental Well-Being:

- Less stressed and emotionally reactive due to reduced levels of stress hormones (adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol);
- Relief from anxiety and depression symptoms;

- Improvement in sleep and reduced insomnia;
- Increased levels of calming and relaxing hormones, which leads to overall peace of mind (dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin);
- Overall happier mood;
- Better focus because the amygdala shrinks (the part of the brain responsible for the sympathetic/emotional reaction), which increases the ability to focus and learn new things;
- Increases in the volume of gray matter in the brain (the part of the brain responsible for short-term memory);
- Improved mental performance as the brain operates at its peak when relaxed and alert; and
- Improvement in the ability to be present during conversations and to, practice active listening.

• Improved Physical Well-Being:

- Better overall air intake for improved respiration, energy and vitality;
- Increased respiration to the brain, so you are able to perform complex cognition and thinking;
- Improvement to immunity;
- Overall healthier heart and circulation because your heart rate and blood pressure are lowered;
- Improved metabolism; and
- Slowing the aging process by preventing the loss of collagen, which makes your skin elastic.

• Improved Behavioral Well-Being:

- Increased self-awareness;
- Increased self-control;
- Able to be more objective;
- Able to be more tolerant;
- Enhanced flexibility;
- Improvement in implementing goal-based behaviors;
- Equanimity, which is mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper, especially in a difficult situation;
- This is a state of psychological stability and composure that is undisturbed by experience of or exposure to emotions, pain, or other phenomena.
- Improved emotional intelligence, which includes increased emotional awareness and regulation; and

Maine Case?
Refer your clients with
confidence to Maine's most
respected plaintiffs' law firm.

WE MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Your client's success
is our shared goal.
Together, let's win.

BERMAN & SIMMONS
TRIAL ATTORNEYS

800.244.3576
bermansimmons.com

- The ability to relate to others and one's self with kindness, acceptance, and compassion.

Many of you know that I have been teaching virtual mindfulness since the Pandemic began in March of 2020 to provide all stressed humans the mindful tools to shift their nervous systems into a more relaxed and healing place. I teach through the Vermont Bar Association and every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 12-12:30 pm (email me if you are interested in joining samara.anderson@vermont.gov).

As of the writing of this article, I have taught 344 virtual mindful practices sessions and the main reason I have continued to do this pro bono work is because it is so extremely effective at increasing my overall well-being. In my opinion, at its core, the most important foundational reason these mindful practices sessions are so powerful at increasing overall well-being is that they increase the participant's self-awareness. Outlined above as one of the behavioral benefits of a mindful practice, self-awareness is the capacity to interpret your actions, feelings and thoughts objectively, and use this awareness to respond in appropriate and healthy ways. Obviously, it can be extremely difficult during challenging times to get far enough away from ourselves or the situations that are triggering us to make an accurate observation. But, if we are lacking in self-awareness, it can lead to responding to others and situations in maladaptive or harmful ways, which is often a disaster for the relationship or situation.

Thus, I was very drawn to a recent article outlining **10 things that highly self-aware people do effortlessly**:¹

1. They are able to consciously respond to stress in healthy ways, turning to healthy strategies available in their wellbeing toolkit.
2. They argue or have discussions without an agenda, listening with the goal of trying to understand and improve the relationship.
3. They embrace criticism and are able to separate the feedback they can use to grow and evolve as opposed to those with a negative agenda.
4. They are able to be objective about themselves, understanding another's view. This allows their minds to remain open with a clear field of vision.
5. They understand how their words and actions affect others, holding true to their values they know when

to speak and when to remain silent.

6. They are genuinely curious about their thought processes, but not obsessed with themselves. They are interested in understanding why they think, feel, and behave the way they do.
7. They are not direct reports to their ego, or their sense of self-esteem or self-importance, which is the part of the mind that mediates between the conscious and the unconscious and is responsible for reality testing and a sense of personal identity.
8. They are tolerant of other people's views, accepting the rights of others to express their views.
9. They can apologize sincerely, admitting when they have wronged or hurt someone or something without resentment or justification.
10. They find ways to grow from adversity, acknowledging where you are right now (and all the feelings that go with it) and knowing you will climb out of the pit and eventually grow from the experience.

As I review this list after incorporating disciplined mindful practices into my life in 2013, I know I still have a long way to go to "easily" achieving it. But those are the most meaningful aspects of practicing mindfulness, I will never reach a point where being human is easy and I am able to be self-aware one hundred percent of the time, but it has enabled me to be substantially healthier and happier! So, join me through mindful sessions and CLEs with the Vermont Bar Association or through my weekly virtual sessions (samara.anderson@vermont.gov).

¹ Adapted from "10 Things Highly Self-Aware People do Effortlessly", by Karen Nimmo on Medium.com (9/5/22).



To enroll in the Vermont Bar Association dental plan, call Pinnacle Financial Corporation at 1-800-200-5434.

DELTA DENTAL
NortheastDeltaDental.com

SPECIAL NEEDS & ESTATE PLANNING CAFFRY LAW, PLLC

Consulting or co-counsel with personal injury, family law and estate planning attorneys across Vermont regarding special needs planning and disability benefit matters



JAMES A. CAFFRY, ESQ.
KAITLYN LEWIS KEATING, ESQ.

- Jim is a parent of a child with special needs
- He is the only member of the Special Needs Alliance – attorneys dedicated to the practice of disability and public benefits law

www.caffrylaw.com • 802.882.8163
46 South Main Street, Suite 3A
Waterbury, VT 05676