Lawyer Resilience and Grit: How to Thrive as a Lawyer

by Dr. Larry Richard
LawyerBrain LLC
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Moderator Bio

Dr. Larry Richard is recognized as the leading expert on the lawyer personality. Since 1981, he has counseled over 500 lawyers and has gathered personality data from over 25,000 lawyers.

He holds a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, and Ph.D. in Psychology from Temple University. He spent the first 15 years of his practice counseling lawyers on career change and career planning. Formerly a consultant with Hildebrandt, he now heads his own firm, LawyerBrain LLC, which helps law firms with leadership, resilience and change management issues.

He is the author of numerous articles on career planning and career satisfaction for lawyers, and the recent book The New What Can You Do With A Law Degree, co-authored with Tanya Hanson.
Lawyer Resilience & Grit: How to Thrive as a Lawyer

Agenda

- Backdrop
- Why are lawyers low in Resilience?
- How can you build your Resilience?

Stressed Out Lawyers

- Feb 2016 study
- ABA + Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation
- Patrick Krill
- 15,000 lawyers across U.S.
- "Between 21% and 36% drink at levels consistent with an alcohol use disorder"
- "3-5 times higher than the government estimates for alcohol use disorders in the general population"
- Highest incidence: among L's in first 10 years of practice
- Stress → drug & alcohol abuse, anxiety, depression, divorce, suicide
Stressed Out Lawyers 2

- Reported anxiety: 19% of lawyers studied
- Reported stress: 23% of lawyers studied
- Reported depression: 28% of lawyers studied

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Negativity & Law Practice

1. The nature of law practice requires negative thinking
2. These factors lead to negative emotional and psychological consequences – stress, depression, substance abuse, divorce, etc.
3. Rapid change just makes it worse
4. Lawyers are less prepared than others to cope with these consequences
5. But wait... There's more...
Who enters a profession like law? Who strives? Thrives?

Personality

What is “Resilience”?

a) Durability in the face of adversity – High resilience individuals tolerate life’s bumps in the road better; “Thick-skinned” vs. “Thin-skinned”
b) The ability to bounce back once you do suffer adversity
90% of lawyers score below the 50th percentile!

Really Low Resilience

RESILIENCE

Average for Lawyers

Average for Public (50th %ile)

Personality and Resilience

- What raises Resilience?
  - Realistic Optimism
  - Social Connection
- What lowers Resilience?
  - Skepticism/Pessimism
  - Social Isolation

Percentage of lawyers and general public on a resilience scale.

Lawyers: 30% in the 50th percentile or below.
General Public: 0% in the 50th percentile or below.

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90% of lawyers score below the 50th percentile!
How do lawyers score on Optimism? Sociability?

High Skepticism (Low Optimism)

Low Sociability (Connecting is awkward)
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How can you build your Resilience?

1. Eliminate the sources of stress . . . if you can . . . but that’s hard to do
2. Or, learn how to respond differently: “Resilience”
   - Let’s look at 4 helpful principles & skills
     “Think Differently. Connect More”

1. Positivity Ratio
The most significant breakthrough in psychology in the past 100 years . . .

Thoughts → Feelings → Behavior

Our “mindset” is the biggest controllable factor in coping successfully with change
Positivity

- Positive Emotions
- Positive Mindset
- Positive Relationships
- Positive Dialogue
- Positive Behavior
- All lead to Positive Emotions
- It’s all about the hormones

Positive Emotions

- Dosage effect
- 3:1 (and 5:1)
- Negative is essential—it’s just that we need to offset it with even more positive
- Because bad is stronger than good
- Offsets lawyer negativity
- Either reduce the negative or strengthen the positive – or both
- Here’s a way to strengthen the positive:

2. Hunt for the Good Stuff
Hunt for the Good Stuff: “Three Good Things”

- Same time each night
- 3 good things
- Need not be things you caused to happen
- 60 seconds to savor
- Repeat, but with new items the next day
- Do for at least two weeks . . . or longer

3. Develop Grit

Grit

- “Passion + perseverance in the pursuit of important long-term goals”
- Angela Duckworth (U. of Penna.)
- Predicts success — e.g., who survives at West Point; National Spelling Bee finalists; success in sales, etc. (For the West Point cadets, Grit mattered more than intelligence, leadership ability or physical fitness.)
- Take the test: https://sasupenn.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0eI6QSO5UzV9qR
- How to build grit? Shift to a “Growth” mindset (Carol Dweck)
4. Increase Social Connections

Extraordinary Research

Dr. Barbara Frederickson, U. of N. Carolina
Increase Social Connection

- Dr. Shelly Gable:
- Constructive vs. Destructive
- Active vs. Passive
- 4 response styles to good news—only one of them builds the relationship
- “Will you be there for me when things go right?”
- How you respond to the good news of others is the single best predictor of an effective long-term relationship
Active-Constructive Responding (Shelly Gable)

"I just won my first case!"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic, authentic support</td>
<td>Quiet, understated support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(&quot;the joy multiplier&quot;)</td>
<td>(&quot;the conversation killer&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quashing the event</td>
<td>Ignoring the event or taking over the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(&quot;They are the parade</td>
<td>conversation (&quot;the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and you are the rain.&quot;)</td>
<td>conversation hijacker&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destructive</strong></td>
<td></td>
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Here’s something that can . . .

- Reduce physical symptoms (fewer colds, headaches)
  (plus lower levels of biomarkers for inflammation)
- Produce greater life satisfaction
- Make people more optimistic about the coming week
- Create higher states of alertness, attentiveness, determination and energy, and reports of sustained better moods
- Result in fewer absences
- Cause people to be more helpful to others
- Lead people to report fewer hassles in their lives
- Foster better sleep quality
- Create an increased feeling of being connected to others
- Generate higher productivity
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Recommended Books

- **The Resilience Factor** by Karen Reivich & Andre Shatte. Describes 7 steps, based on cognitive psychology, that can enable an individual to increase his/her Resilience.
- **Flourish** by Martin Seligman. His most recent book. A good introduction to positive psychology.
- **Learned Optimism** by Martin Seligman. One of his earlier books, but a very important one. Describes his original model of "optimism" or "explanatory style", and how it can be learned.
- **Positive Leadership** by Kim Cameron. A synopsis of the empirical research in positive psychology as applied to organizations, as of 2008.

Recommended Books, cont’d

- **Positivity** by Barbara Frederickson. Describes her original research on the "positivity" model and why we need a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative communication. Also see her latest book, *Love 2.0*
- **Grit** by Angela Duckworth. Explains the research on "Grit"—what causes it, and how to get it.
- **Mindset** by Carol Dweck. Explains the difference between a "fixed" mindset and a "growth" mindset, and how to change from one to the other.
- **The Happiness Advantage** by Shawn Achor. A very readable summary of the latest principles of positive psychology.
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