TOP TRAITS FOR SUCCESS ON THE JOB

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This publication accompanies the audio program entitled “Top Traits for Success on the Job” broadcast on December 13, 2013 (Event code: CEC3DEC).
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Presentation Slides

2. Career: Pressure Proof: Three Ways to Build Resilience
   Paula Davis-Laack

3. What Makes Lawyers Tick?
   Dr. Larry Richard
Top Traits for Success on the Job

December 13, 2013 | 1:00 PM Eastern

Faculty Bios

Paula Davis-Laack is an internationally published writer, blogger, speaker, and a Top 10 online influencer, focusing on lawyer stress, resilience, and happiness. She received a Master’s Degree in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and a JD from Marquette Law School. Paula practiced law for 7 years before burning out, going back to school, and changing careers.

Jim Lovelace is a leader in attorney professional development, currently serving as Director of Lawyer T & D at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman and as Chair of the Professional Development Consortium. He was a litigation associate after getting his AB at Duke and his JD from the University of Texas School of Law.
Moderator Bio

Kathy Morris founded Under Advisement, Ltd. in 1988 to help lawyers excel in their careers. She was a criminal defense lawyer before starting her work in lawyer professional development and training. She also was the original creator of the ABA Career Center.

Kathy earned her BA from the University of Michigan and her JD from Northeastern University School of Law in Boston.

She is the series moderator for the monthly ABA CareerAdvice Live programs.

Program Agenda

- Faculty Discussion
- Tips on the Topic
- Audience Questions
- Agree/Disagree
- More Audience Questions
- TakeAways
- ABA Resources in the Series
- ABA Career Center
Success Traits

Accountable  Analytic  Add your own thoughts on task-based success traits (strong writer) as well as personality traits (team player) and other traits that would make you a “fit” within your workplace or one in which you would like to work.
Energetic  Intelligent
Enthusiastic  Expressive
Flexible  Responsive
Likeable  Timely
Confident  Organized
Trustworthy  Resourceful

Top Issues

Success Traits Shared by New Lawyers
Success Traits of those more Seasoned
Success Traits Beyond the more Obvious
Success Traits: Developing/Deepening
Success Traits: Audience Questions
Tips on the Topic

Become your own lawyer and believe in your success.

Use “what if” and “what else” thinking.

Engage in introspection in deciding how to describe your value.

Integrate your interests and your work.

Question(s)?

From Program Participants...
Agree/Disagree

Success Traits for “hard skills” trump those for “soft skills.”

If you lack some…or even all…of the top traits for success on the job, you may still succeed.
More Questions?

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TakeAways

To become a more assertive communicator
make your CASE...
To become a more assertive communicator, make your CASE...

Better listeners make better lawyers...

Observe and model the success traits of others...when you can.
ABA CareerAdvice Live Site

Upcoming Programs

- **Top Traits for Success on the Job**
  - December 13, 2013
  - 1:00 PM to 1:45 PM ET

- **Motivating Your Supervisors to Give It to You Straight**
  - January 10, 2014
  - 1:00 PM to 1:45 PM ET

- **Alternative Careers: One Degree, Plenty of Latitude**
  - February 14, 2014
  - 1:00 PM to 1:45 PM ET

Remember to Visit the ABA Career Center website, too, at www.americanbar.org/resources_for_lawyers/careercenter.html

And return to www.ambar.org/4advice to register for our next CareerAdvice Live program on

Motivating Your Supervisors....
Featuring Sue Manch and Steve Armstrong

Register Now for January 10, 2014
Resilience is the ability to bounce back, grow, and thrive through stress, challenge, and adversity. Resilience can be learned, practiced, and improved. Here are some skills that can help lawyers perform under pressure.

Chronic stress is a fact of life for many lawyers. Over time, chronic stress can undercut your ability to perform optimally and to lead effectively. Dr. Larry Richard’s research indicates that many lawyers rank quite low when it comes to resilience, often falling within the 10th percentile or lower. Fortunately, decades of research shows that resilience can be taught, practiced, and improved. Resilience skills help you cope with stress, remain task focused, increase your ability to overcome setbacks, and perform under pressure.

This article explains what resilience is and what abilities help to increase resilience. It also provides three research-based skills you can begin using today that will build your resilience.

**Defining Resilience**

**Six Abilities that Make up Resilience, Three Strategies to Build Them**

-Six specific abilities that make up resilience:
1. Flexible and accurate thinking
2. Self-regulation
3. Self-awareness
4. Meaning and purpose
5. Connection with others
6. Optimism.

Three strategies to build resilience abilities:

7. Analyze what pushes your buttons.
8. Help others savor good news.

Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back, grow, and thrive through stress, challenge, and adversity. The six specific abilities that make up resilience are the following:

10. **Flexible and Accurate Thinking.** Resilient people are solution-oriented and capable of seeing a problem from all sides.
11. **Self-regulation.** An important aspect of being resilient is knowing how and when to regulate your behavior and emotions. It might be tempting to send that tell-it-like-it-is email to opposing counsel, but while doing so might make you feel good in the short term, rarely will it advance your long-term goals.
12. **Self-awareness.** People with high self-awareness are able to identify their own counterproductive thinking patterns and have a good understanding of why they are thinking and acting a certain way.
13. **Meaning and Purpose.** Resilient people derive a great deal of meaning from something in their lives, whether it is work, family, volunteering, or another personal activity.
14. **Connection with Others.** A common misconception is that resilient people can handle things all on their own. This could not be further from the truth. Resilience is about building strong relationships, being able to communicate effectively, and being willing to reach out for help. Research shows that even having one other person to count on increases resilience and happiness levels.
15. **Optimism.** When you hear the word "optimism," do you think of a big smiley face, or Pollyanna, or even an ostrich with its head stuck in the sand? That’s not the kind of optimism that builds resilience. Optimism as a resilience ability is about a thinking style and not about a personality trait. Figure 1 compares optimistic and pessimistic thinking styles and illustrates how each style can affect you.

Not only does having a pessimistic thinking style set you up for helplessness and depression, it also has other negative consequences. Compared to pessimistic thinkers, optimistic thinkers:

- are healthier (they get colds less frequently, and when sick, recover more quickly);
are happier\textsuperscript{3} (research shows that optimistic thinkers are much less likely to get depressed);

live longer (on average, eight years longer);\textsuperscript{4}

are much less likely to die of a second heart attack (in one study, 120 men were followed after their first heart attack; eight and half years later, of the 16 most pessimistic thinkers, 15 had died, but of the 16 most optimistic thinkers, only five had died);\textsuperscript{5} and

perform better under pressure. (In a study at U.C.-Berkeley, swimmers were given false feedback after swimming their best event. After a short period of rest, they re-swam the event. The optimistic thinkers did better, many registering personal bests, while the pessimistic thinkers did worse than their original times.)\textsuperscript{6}

Three Resilience Skills

Lawyers can implement easy strategies that build their resilience. Here are three research-based skills you can implement today that will build the resilience abilities discussed above.

WisLAP Helps Lawyers Cope

Lawyers who may need help can contact the State Bar's Wisconsin Lawyers Assistance Program (WisLAP). This program provides confidential assistance to help Wisconsin lawyers, judges, law students, and their families cope with problems related to the stress of practicing law by maintaining a professionally staffed telephone helpline and a support network of trained volunteers.

Confidential support is available at (800) 543-2625. The WisLAP Coordinator is Linda Albert, who can be reached at (800) 444-9404, ext. 6172.

1) \textbf{Analyze What Pushes Your Buttons}. Use this four-step process when you are curious about a reaction you had, do not like a reaction you had, or simply want to find a new way of looking at a problem. This technique is based on the work of Dr. Albert Ellis and can help you to understand why your thought process is off track:

- Describe factually what pushed your buttons (who, what, where, when).
- Write down your reaction – both what you did and how you felt (“I felt angry and yelled”).
- Write down exactly what you were thinking in-the-moment during the challenge.
- Ask yourself whether your reaction helped or hurt your ability to find a solution.

People tend to focus only on the reaction part of the equation, but those reactions are driven by how you think. If you want to change your reaction to a situation, you need to change the way you think about it. \textit{Targeted Resilience Abilities: Self-awareness and flexible and accurate thinking.}
2) **Help Others Savor Good News.** When someone enters your office and says, "I have a problem," how do you react? Like most people, you probably stop what you are doing and listen. But how do you react when someone shares good news? Dr. Shelly Gable's research shows that how you respond to a person's good news is as important for the health of the relationship as how you respond to bad news. This applies across the board, from personal relationships to business interactions. (See Figure 2: "The Good News Is.") Only "active constructive" responses build strong relationships; the other three styles weaken relationships. **Targeted Resilience Abilities:** Connection with others, self-awareness, and self-regulation.

3) **Shut Down Worst-Case-Scenario Thinking.** This style of thinking happens when the negative part of your brain takes over and spins a worst-case scenario in your head. It is a downward-spiral style of thinking that leaves you unable to take purposeful action. You are more prone to this style of thinking if you are tired or stressed or have ambiguous information. For example, you might get an email from a partner you just submitted an assignment to that says, "Come see me now" with no other information. As a parent, you might turn around in a store and notice your child is not standing next to you. Both situations may cause you to feel anxiety, even panic; but, not being able to take purposeful action to find a solution makes this style of thinking particularly worrisome.

To stop worst-case-scenario thinking, you need to follow a four-step plan:

- Write down all of the worst-case-scenario thoughts you are having.
- Make up an equally improbable best-case scenario. The purpose of this is to generate some positive emotion to jolt you out of worst-case-scenario mode.
- Write down the most likely scenario.
- Develop a plan to address the likely scenario. **Targeted Resilience Abilities:** Flexible and accurate thinking and optimism.

**Figure 1**

*Comparison of Optimistic and Pessimistic Thinking Styles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optimistic Thinkers:</th>
<th>Pessimistic Thinkers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure out what is within their control during a setback.</td>
<td>Do not see where they have control over causes of their setbacks and often fail to find solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know &quot;this too shall pass.&quot; They know that a stressor might be around for a while, but it will not be around</td>
<td>Think that a stressor will be around for a very long time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
forever.

| Know how to compartmentalize. If they have a setback at work, the fallout does not bleed into other areas of their life. | Believe that the cause of a particular problem will affect many different areas of their life (widespread impact instead of specific impact). |

**Figure 2**

**Comparison of Response Styles to Another Person’s Good News**

**The Good News Is: “I just made partner.”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Active Constructive</strong> (Showing authentic interest by helping the person re-live the good news):</th>
<th><strong>Active Destructive</strong> (Taking a negative focus):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congratulations! You have been putting in a lot of work for many years now. How are you going to celebrate?</td>
<td>That's great, but aren't you going to have even more pressure at work? When are you ever going to see your kids?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Passive Constructive</strong> (Killing the conversation by offering distracted or understated support):</th>
<th><strong>Passive Destructive</strong> (Ignoring or taking over the conversation):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That's nice.</td>
<td>That reminds me! I've been meaning to tell you that I made partner as well. I was so nervous about whether it would happen, but I've been building my book of business for years, so I had my fingers crossed!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Lawyers face daily challenges and stressors. You can build the specific resilience abilities mentioned above to maximize the likelihood that you will be able to optimally perform through not only big, but also daily, life stressors.

**Endnotes**


4 Hilary A. Tindle et al., *Optimism, Cynical Hostility & Incident Coronary Heart Disease & Mortality in the Women's Health Initiative*, 120 Circulation 56-62 (2009).


9 Seligman, *supra* note 6, at 43-50.

**Paula Davis-Laack**, Marquette 2002, MAPP, is a stress and resilience expert who works with attorneys to help them perform at optimal levels and avoid burnout. In addition to designing and teaching resilience workshops for attorneys and law students, she teaches resilience skills to soldiers in the U.S. Army. She writes extensively about resilience, stress management, and work/life balance for Psychology Today, The Huffington Post, Ms. JD, and other publications. Contact her at paula@marieelizabethcompany.com, or visit www.marieelizabethcompany.com.
I've been gathering data on lawyers' personalities since the early 1980's. Personality traits are typically measured on a percentile scale ranging from zero % to 100%. When large samples of the general public are tested, individuals' scores on a given trait typically form a classic bell curve, with the mean average for any given trait hovering around the 50th percentile. But lawyers are different. As I have written about elsewhere, there are a number of traits on which lawyers tend to score much higher or much lower than the general public—in short, we’re outliers. The most extreme of all these outlier traits—the one on which lawyers consistently score higher (i.e., above the mean) than all the others—is Skepticism.

People with a very high Skepticism score tend to look at the world through a “glass half empty” lens—they focus on problems rather than on what’s working well; they tend toward the suspicious; they assume the worst, and rarely give others the “benefit of the doubt”. They wonder what another person’s “real” motive might be for any action that person takes. They question any assertion made by another person. And they tend to be slower to trust others.

On the surface, these may sound like negative thoughts and behaviors. However, considering the nature of what lawyers do for a living, these are quite functional and make a lot of sense. Many aspects of law practice require lawyers to scrutinize documents, transactions, actual or potential adversaries, deals, proposed actions, and the like, in order to protect their client. Lawyers are always asking, “What could possibly go wrong?” “What errors exist?” “Are there any potential sources of liability?” “Who might be at fault?” “Are there any exceptions to what has been asserted?” And, “Is there anything we should know about that hasn’t been disclosed?”

These questions, collectively, are often thought of as “critical thinking”. There is no doubt that they enable a lawyer to protect the client. But these days, lawyers wear many other hats that they didn’t used to wear—mentor, supervisor, manager, leader, rainmaker, committee chair, etc. And in all these newer roles, “critical thinking” – which in these other contexts can really be thought of as “negative thinking” – can actually get in the way. In fact, a steady diet of negative thinking can actually burn in neural pathways in the brain that deeply habituate a negative, pessimistic mindset, a filtering system that insures that the lawyer will see the half-empty glass and may even miss many of the half-full glasses.

Despite the need for more flexibility than ever before (specifically, there’s a need for lawyers to be able to “turn on” or “turn off” the Skeptical mindset), the fact remains that in today’s law practice climate, there are a number of reasons that high Skepticism is so common among lawyers and is likely to remain that way for some time to come.
First, because the personality trait of Skepticism provides an important advantage to any lawyer by making critical thinking more natural and easier, people with high levels of Skepticism are more likely to be attracted to the law in the first place. It feels more like a natural fit than many other jobs might. The more your personality aligns with the work you regularly do, the more likely you are to rate your job as satisfying. So the legal profession starts out with an overrepresentation of skeptics. (I'm using the word “overrepresentation” in the sense that statisticians use it—there are more high Skeptics in law than would be expected, based on their distribution in the general population.)

Second, for the same reason as above—i.e., the degree of “fit” between the person and the job—those lawyers with low Skepticism scores tend to drop out of law school and out of law practice (usually in their early years) at a higher rate than do those with high Skepticism scores. This “concentrates the herd” and results in a more overall skeptical cohort of lawyers who remain in practice.

Finally, Skepticism increases over time because lawyers work in a Skeptical environment. Every personality trait is partly dispositional (i.e., influenced by genes) and partly learned. Recent research suggests that genetics provide a larger contribution than previously suspected; however, Skepticism is an exception to that tendency—it is a trait that is significantly influenced by one’s environment. This means that the longer a lawyer works in a workplace in which the majority of his/her colleagues think and talk in Skeptical ways, the more Skeptical s/he will become over time.

These three forces are all moving in the same direction, fostering a culture of Skepticism in most law firms and a pattern of Skepticism in most lawyers. Over time, this becomes just the normal background “noise” and is taken for granted. Plus, it's rare to find any counterbalancing force in most law firms that rewards “accepting” thinking or trusting behavior (the opposites of Skepticism). Skepticism is a one-way street, which is why it seems so normal to most lawyers, and why it's so hard for others—friends, spouses, staff, even clients—to shake lawyers out of their Skeptical mindset, even though, as noted above, in the newer roles that lawyers play today, lowering Skepticism and increasing accepting and trusting behavior is a growing necessity.

If, after reading this post, you find yourself taking my ideas with a grain of salt, you can begin to see the problem . . .