**FIVE TIPS FOR BOOSTING RESILIENCE**

While judicial stressors in today’s age are legion, literature dedicated to its amelioration remains slim.¹ Fortunately, social science research now touts a host of evidence-based practices that hold promise as everyday “DIY projects” that can boost resilience and enhance overall well-being. In a nutshell, the term resilience, as defined by these researchers, describes one’s ability to bounce back and, ideally, grow from adversity.² The challenges, including extreme stress and burnout, faced by the judiciary are undoubtedly a type of adversity brought on by demands of the bench.

Each of the following five tips are proven ways to increase resilience and healthfully cope with not only daily stressors but those compounded by the frenetic holiday season.

1. **Practice Gratitude.**

The trait of gratitude has garnered extensive study as one of the most effective character strengths of people who lead flourishing lives.³ Keeping a gratitude journal (logging a short list of those things for which one is most grateful on several days each week) has been shown to increase a person’s happiness by 25% over ten weeks.⁴ Studies also show that practicing gratitude benefits us physically, resulting in more energy, healthier bodies, better sleep, and increased life span.⁵

2. **Practice Mindfulness.**

The mind is an instrument, but too often the instrument becomes the master. Breathing exercises, meditation, and mindfulness practices have proven highly effective for those in this cerebral profession who need to relax and “quiet the mind.”⁶ Meditation can increase focus, reduce negative affect, decrease depressive symptoms, and decrease rumination, all things judges and

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² See University of Pennsylvania’s Positive Psychology Center ([http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/](http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/)), led by Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman. See [http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/research/positive-psychology-research](http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/research/positive-psychology-research).
⁵ Id.
lawyers need. Meditation also increases memory and recall function among those dealing with high stress situations.

What is meditation, also known as mindfulness? Very simply, it is paying attention to the present moment with intention and without judgment. Practicing mindfulness is often done by focusing on the breath or on a phrase and an extensive number of instructional exercises exist online or on apps. An excellent resource can be accessed for free through the UCLA Mindfulness Awareness Research Center.

3. Volunteer to Help Others.

Studies have shown that doing volunteer service work, or helping others, can lead to an enhanced sense of well-being and an overall improvement in mental health and happiness. In a major study, those employed in high stress jobs had a 43% higher rate of death over a ten year period; however, a related study of those who regularly performed service work for others in need, the rate of death was completely normal despite having high stress jobs.

4. Practice Self-Compassion.

Essentially, self-compassion is sensitivity to the experience of one’s suffering and a deep desire to alleviate that suffering. Self-compassion practices deactivate the “fight or flight” nervous system that causes ongoing stress, returning the body to the self-soothing system associated with secure attachment and safety. This practice has also been shown to help substantially with motivation, coping abilities, and interpersonal relationships.

Some self-compassion practices include: when dealing with yourself harshly ask internally, “How would I talk to a friend about this?”, reframing self-critical thoughts as they arise so that they are

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9 Guided breathing exercises and meditations: http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22.


14 See Kristen Neff, Self-Compassion: What it is, What it Does, and How it Relates to Mindfulness, supra at p. 133.
fair and kind; each time a critical thought arises, balance it with a complimentary one. More self-compassion practices can be found online.

5. **Cultivate Your Sense of Humor.**

Studies show that having a sense of humor is directly related to reduced stress, better psychological wellbeing, improved coping ability, better perspective, stronger social support, better temperament, and better physical health. In particular, a 2014 study found that a good sense of humor may be one of the most important ingredients to resilience, noting that humor provides a behavioral tendency to engage in acts that promote happiness while stabilizing a positive attitude.

About the author:

Bree Buchanan, JD, is director of the Texas Lawyers Assistance Program. TLAP hosts the ABA’s National Helpline for Judges Helping Judges (1-800-219-6474), a resource for judges who find themselves low in resilience and seeking help for issues related to substance use and mental health disorders. Ms. Buchanan is also chair of the ABA’s Commission on Lawyers Assistance Programs and co-chair of the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being.