Escape to Your Practice

*Finding Gratitude for the Practice of Law in Difficult Times*

By: Anna Mallon

Working as a lawyer is one of the most intellectually rewarding jobs out there. This is often what I tell myself and others as a reason I enjoy my job. I couch it in terms of “intellectual stimulation.” Intellectual stimulation is listed on the “pro” side of being a lawyer. That being said, many days I have felt like I needed a break from thinking because thinking is what I do all day long (and sometimes at night, too). I admit that I have even caught myself saying that I don’t want to read because I read all day. This relentless demand for critical thinking while solving other people’s problems contributes to the stress and burnout in our profession. The last few months, however, I have realized that this opportunity to think as part of my job, while shut in at home in the midst of a global pandemic, is one of the life lines that has gotten me through.

Practicing law occupies your mind. Being a lawyer has been described as a thinking job and not just a doing job. Lately, the news around us has been horrible and the decisions we face about tasks as simple as buying groceries have been daunting. In these times, I have found my law practice a welcome respite from the world around me. Researching legal issues, writing briefs, responding to challenging requests for admission, or simply thinking about my cases has served to occupy my mind and provide a distraction--a necessary distraction--in 2020. I never imagined that I would turn to my work as a stress reliever, but lately it is serving that purpose. It has been nice to have the practice of law to take my mind off it all.

Practicing law combats boredom. A recent article in the *Washington Post,* “These Are Boom Times for Boredom and the Researchers Who Study It,” explained how boredom is surprisingly a relatively new area of research and Covid-19 has provided the perfect opportunity to study it. John Eastwood, an associate professor in the department of psychology at York University in Toronto, Canada, describes boredom as the “uncomfortable feeling of wanting but being unable to engage in satisfying activity.” That definition resonates right now. The onslaught of cancellations, the lack of social interaction, and the monotony of the days, even while juggling work and kids at home, has led to an uncomfortable feeling: boredom. Eastwood explains that “boredom is a signal like pain, alerting us to the fact that we’re not engaging our minds.” While it is nice to have the time to tackle home projects and learn a new hobby, I feel fortunate to have something right at my finger tips that engages my mind. Susan Reynolds, an author, explained in *Psychology Today* that if you don’t find your job challenging, you’ve likely zoned out due to boredom. The mental challenge of our profession helps combat boredom.

Practicing law can be done remotely. I am writing this article from a lake home in Union Pier, Michigan. Before this week and since mid-March, I have been working almost entirely from my home. I know many are similarly situated. And with the exception of tasks that really need an in-person presence, much of what we do can be done anywhere and anytime. This flexibility has allowed many of us to be at home supporting our families while supporting our law practice. The ability to work remotely and to work *well* remotely is unique to our profession.

I had a conversation with a lawyer friend at some point during this quarantine. Our conversations usually involve both of us venting about the challenges in trying to juggle our busy jobs and our busy homes, but this conversation had a different tone. At various points in the conversation, and in different ways, we both expressed a feeling of gratitude for what our jobs are providing in these difficult times. Something to turn to, something interesting to do, something we are able to do at home right now. There are many articles circulating about how in this time of slow down when things have essentially come to a stop, we should think carefully about what we add back into our lives. Good advice. I think I will add back in a new found gratitude for my profession, the practice of law. You never know when you might need it.

Think about it.

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