

THE BALANCED LAWYER



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WHEN A PROBLEM COMES ALONG, YOU MUST WHIP IT

As an ambitious attorney, you’re likely faced with difficult, complex challenges almost daily. When issues snowball into frustrating problems, your stress level is likely to increase, and your professional satisfaction is likely to decrease. Below are three tactics to help you better manage situations.

1. Shift your focus

Sometimes, when a situation you encounter doesn’t seem to be solvable, and you are at loggerheads, the most appropriate step might be to forsake the issue for a while, and to focus on something completely different.

For instance, it might be better for you to abandon what you’ve been doing, and seek to help someone else. Perhaps one of your associates needs help solving a different problem. By delving into that problem, you give yourself the type of break that you cannot otherwise experience when you’re entrenched in your own “stuff.” Your mind works in mysterious ways. It’s working for you even when you’re not conscious of it. This is why you get great ideas while shaving or putting on makeup, in the shower, or sometimes while resting in the hammock in the backyard.

Helping somebody else within your firm offers the side benefit of having others see you in a more positive light. After all, in the midst of your troubles, you’re able to turn your attention to someone else.

As a by-product of helping others, sometimes you experience the “eureka effect,” the solution to your problem jumps out at you when you seemingly weren’t attempting to find a solution.

2. Acknowledge your emotions

When you ask yourself, “How do I feel right now?” and you’re honest with yourself, something strange and wonderful happens. By noticing how you feel, you can dissipate some of your feelings about being upset. The same works for being overly stressed or anxious.

I was embarrassed all as heck once. I had done something, in full view of dozens of people, and there was no place to hide (never mind what it was!). In that moment, I caught myself thinking, “Wow! I am feeling so embarrassed.” The next moment, I didn’t feel nearly as embarrassed. The mere act of noticing the undesirable feeling that I was experiencing helped to diminish it.

It’s as if the act of noticing how you’re feeling competes with the actual emotion itself and decreases its intensity. Perhaps competing energies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Feeling upset and noticing that you are feeling upset, in a way, “compete” for the same space.

You’re better off noticing that you are feeling upset as opposed just to feeling upset. In the former, you have the option of doing something, whereas in the latter, you tend to be at the mercy of how you feel. Once you notice how you feel, you’re better able to

make the leap from the raw feeling of experiencing to the potentially more beneficial one of noticing how you feel.

3. Recognize that a problem comes with a solution

Charles F. Kettering, a co-founder of the Sloan-Kettering Institute, was a brilliant inventor in the last century, akin to Thomas Edison, although Kettering is barely known today. He perfected the diesel engine, chrome plating procedures, automobile ignition systems, and dozens of other innovations that transformed the automobile industry in the 1920s and 1930s.

Kettering's approach to problem-solving was unsurpassed. He believed that the major distinction between a problem and a solution was that people more readily understood a solution. He noted that solutions involved merely a change in perception, since the solution to the problem must have existed all along, within the problem itself. A problem solver's job was not to master a problem, but to make the problem generate its solution.

When it comes to problems that you experience, perhaps even long-standing problems, a solution exists. And, as with Kettering's insight, the solution has existed all along in tandem with the problem itself. You can explore the problem's key questions, and the answers invariably generate the solutions that you are seeking. 🔥