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Coffee, Meditation and Perspective: A Look at a Morning Routine

I recognize that this may not be possible for everyone in all stages of their lives, nevertheless, it has worked for me the last several years. So, in addition to the standard advice of eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise, I commend you coffee, meditation and perspective.

By Dana W. Chilson | October 15, 2020 at 12:43 PM

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Dana Chilson, McNeese Wallace & Nurick

While I am no health or wellness expert, I have done a fair amount of research and experimenting over the years on nailing down a morning routine that works for me. When I volunteered to write this article, the country was pre-pandemic. When COVID-19 hit in full force here in the United States in March, I seriously considered taking another view of how this article should be written. And while our world has undoubtedly changed in so many ways since March, this morning routine has been a source of comfort to me during these times. As such, I share it with you, in the hopes

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that perhaps you may find a similar satisfaction. I recognize that this may not be possible for everyone in all stages of their lives, nevertheless, it has worked for me for the last several years. So, in addition to the standard advice of eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise, I commend to you coffee, meditation and perspective.

• **Coffee!**

Yes, I know, it is no secret that coffee is the key to many people finding the energy to get out of bed in the morning, particularly in these stressful times. And while not everyone may love coffee as much as I do, it is not really about that deliciously warm beverage (or cold brew during those hot summer months)—it is about the routine. Like so many other attorneys I know, I find comfort in a routine, especially in a time of upheaval. A few years ago, my husband insisted on buying an espresso/latte maker. I pushed back, telling him it would be just one more kitchen gadget that ended up in our already overly crowded attic, to collect dust and to be donated to charity in a few years. As it turns out, I was very wrong (he is unlikely to read this article, so let's keep that admission between us). It was not really about the coffee, although the machine makes some truly delicious lattes. It was about the routine, the comfort of waking up in the morning, firing up the espresso maker, hearing its hum, and going through the motions. No matter what was going on, it was a constant. A reminder that “normalcy” was achievable, even when I was so stressed, I was not sure how I would make it through the day.

I am not the only one to notice the draw of a morning routine. Hal Elrod wrote the “Miracle Morning,” which I read and enjoyed. While marketed as a productivity routine, it was simply the routine aspect that drew me to the book. Elrod's book walks through six steps: silence, exercise, reading, visualization, affirmations and scribing. And while I did not find that trying to jam all of these items into my morning produced any miracles, I can certainly see how it could help others. Simply Googling “morning routine” produces a plethora of results. Regardless whether the Miracle Morning or something else works for you, I highly recommend trying to establish a habit or routine that brings you comfort.

• **Meditation**

Again, I am no expert here. I have read articles on the science behind meditation and the measurable benefits to physical and mental health from a regular meditation practice. The law community has been taking a close look at meditation as an aid to assist in mental health issues. It comes down to this: it makes me feel better, so I continue to practice. I worry, a lot—about work, family, you name it. I certainly understand the sense that meditation is “just one more thing to have to do in the morning.” For me though, it's worth it. I am a complete beginner, despite years of practice. If I find 10 minutes in my day to sit down and meditate, I pat myself on the back. For those of you interested in giving it a go, I offer a few suggestions about products that may help you along the way.

The books are numerous and overwhelming, but here are a few I have read and have found beneficial. “The Anxious Lawyer” by Jenna Cho and Karen Gifford was a great read, and as evident from the title, is geared toward assisting those in the legal profession. In addition to insights into how to deal with your practice and how your practice fits into life in general, Cho and Gifford lay out meditation exercises. If you are looking for more background and tips on meditation specifically, try “Wherever

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You Go, There You Are” by Jon Kabat-Zinn. I also truly enjoyed “10% Happier,” by Dan Harris. Harris, a name many of you will recognize from his career in broadcasting, writes a delightful book that lays out his path to meditation.

If you are looking for someone to walk you through a guided meditation, I use and enjoy the Headspace app, which covers a wide variety of topics from stress/anxiety, change, appreciation, focus, pain management, and so on. Harris also has a meditation app, Ten Percent Happier Meditation, and many people I know use the app Calm.

Whatever method you choose to start your practice, note the key here is that perfection is not required, and like law, meditation is a *practice*. While I may never get meditation “right”, I can feel better trying.

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• **Perspective**

This one is particularly tough in the world we live in today. But sometimes, you just have to look on the bright side. And so, gratitude has played a huge part in my morning routine over the last few years. Again, there is scientific research on this, and I am sure a simple click through a search engine will bring up a ton of articles. Science or no, sometimes I just need to adjust my bad attitude. To do that, I concentrate on gratitude. Like meditation, there is no one size fits all. I sometimes feel silly for that which I am grateful (like my morning espresso). But you know what? I *am* grateful for that tiny cup of coffee. I share this by way of saying do not feel silly doing this—not everything you are grateful for will be deeply profound. Regardless, I have found writing down three things for which I am grateful for in the mornings helps me set my mindset for the day. Does it always dispel my sour mood? Absolutely not, but it doesn’t hurt. I bought a gratitude journal from Amazon that has fun quotes and spaces for your thoughts. No need to be fancy though—regular paper is fine. While I happen to do this in the morning, I know many people write down their thoughts before bed to help ease them into sleep. There is no right or wrong time of the day.

If you are considering establishing a morning routine, I hope these few thoughts aid you in some manner. I know this will not be the perfect fit for everyone, but if it gave you even a few ideas about how to achieve a greater peace of mind, then that is something I will be sure to enter into my gratitude journal. And if anyone has a morning routine they'd like to share with me, I'd love to hear about it!

Happy coffee drinking everyone.

Dana Chilson is a member of the McNeese Wallace & Nurick's litigation, financial services, Injunction, eminent domain and public sector practice groups, as well as chair of the insurance group. Chilson focuses her practice on representing commercial and business clients in complex contract challenges and business disputes. She has extensive experience in counseling on shareholder and corporate rights.

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