

Making Lawyers Who Lead

“The growth and development of people is the highest calling of a leader.”

--John Maxwell

If you're a lawyer, then leading is both your calling and your profession. In practicing law, you're helping build society, shape cultural and legal norms, and fight injustice on multiple fronts.

Yet now more than ever, lawyers are struggling to lead. The legal field is awash with disengagement and burnout, which keeps our best and brightest minds from flourishing. At each level—from law student to equity partner—lawyers are failing to thrive. And without passion, purpose, and the ability to put both into practice, leading is all but impossible.

Something needs to change.

The Status Quo

Just nine percent of law students begin law school with symptoms of anxiety or depression—a rate similar to the general population. But by the end of their first year, *forty percent* are struggling with chronic anxiety and/or depression. Many turn to unhealthy habits to cope, and those habits follow them into and throughout their careers.

Practicing lawyers often don't fare much better. Recent surveys show that lawyers across the country are experiencing all-time lows in levels of engagement, satisfaction, and well-being at work. We suffer higher levels of depression, and we're more likely to suffer from other mental health issues and to abuse substances than other demanding professions like medicine.

How can we help our colleagues and ourselves thrive again so we can lead?

There are at least two ways: we can change the measuring stick for success, and we can adopt a mindset of growth and grit.

Change Your Measuring Stick For Success

How do we measure our success now?

For many of us, the answer is not one of our own making, but a measurement provided by fixed, external measures of success. This is a problem.

Larry Krieger and Kennon Sheldon's recent study, "*What Makes Lawyers Happy? A Data Driven Prescription for Success*," confirms what many of us intuitively may know but don't act upon: external measures of success, like getting good grades don't create well-being. And well-being is an inherent element of our ability to lead. In fact, the lowest predictors of well-being for law students and lawyers are the following: *Grades, Income, School Debt, Class Rank, School Rank, Law Journal, and Making Partner*. No surprise, the billable hour is also negatively correlated with any prediction of well-being.

So what *does* predict happiness? Krieger and Sheldon are unequivocal: *Autonomy, Relatedness, Competence, Internal Motivation, Support, Alignment with Values*. That's why, they explain, the happiest lawyers are judges, followed closely by service lawyers, where autonomy, internal motivation, and similar markers of well-being are built into a lawyer's day-to-day work. (For those aiming for promotion to partner: according to Krieger and Sheldon, junior partners and senior associates report no difference in their levels of well-being.)

These results are telling for law schools and employers. The findings demand that we create work spaces that encourage growth, competence and autonomy. Some schools and firms have started to embrace this approach: adopting flex time, offering generous leave and benefit programs, and teaching the key traits of mindfulness and resiliency, all of which increase well-being while boosting retention, engagement, and compassion for others.

Say Yes to Growth and Grit

The burden however, is not solely on law firms and schools. We each have a personal and professional responsibility of competence to be our best, to give our best and to lead. And there are two simple ways to do that: by cultivating a growth mindset and embracing grit. Research shows that these two traits are the single most crucial determinants of success—and fortunately, research also shows that they're skills that can be learned. Here's how:

1. *Cultivate a growth mindset*

Mindset is a principle developed by Carol Dweck, a psychologist and professor at Stanford University. People with a fixed mindset believe that humans are born with a set amount of intelligence and talent.

People with a growth mindset, however, believe that their mind is like a muscle: the more they work it and put in effort, the smarter they become. People with a growth mindset believe that mistakes help them learn—and they're right. Our brains learn best from constructive feedback, not from succeeding every time. Even just learning that growth mindset exists has reversed long-standing trends of poor performance in Dweck's studies.

A belief in yourself—that your effort makes a difference, that mistakes help you learn, and that feedback helps you grow—can change your life.

2. *Get gritty*

Grit, a concept coined by Angela Duckworth, MacArthur fellow and Genius Grant recipient, is perseverance and passion for long-term goals.

Being gritty requires persistence toward a particular goal in the face of adversity. The takeaway on grit is *not* to be tough. It's about focused and deliberate effort in pursuit of a goal. Sustained passionate pursuit doesn't exist without love, or at least interest, in the goal you choose. To exercise grit, try asking the following:

- How can I improve my situation? Optimism helps create resilience.
- Is this thought true and helpful? Kindness and self-compassion can help you out of any downward spiral.
- What can I do to bring myself joy? This can bring perspective and meaning when something stressful happens.

So rediscover your love of learning, commit to being imperfect and watch as your brain grows. Cultivate an appreciation for a different model of success that embraces what we all bring to the

table and develop a growth mindset as you get gritty. You will lead those around you while inspiring yourself to keep making changes in life and law.

For more information, visit the LAP website at www.illinoislap.org, or contact the Chicago LAP office at 20 South Clark St, Suite 450, call to visit any of our office state-wide 312-726-6607. You may also send a 100% confidential email to gethelp@illinoislap.org. The only wrong thing to do is to do nothing. LAP is here to help.



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Ms. Callahan's labor and employment practice focuses on complex class actions, including Title VII, ADA, ADEA and ERISA litigation. Ms. Callahan devotes a significant portion of her time to lecturing on topics of lawyer well-being and happiness and to mentoring fellow lawyers. She also commits a significant amount of time to her pro bono practice each year, focusing on wrongful conviction cases with Northwestern University Law School's Center for Wrongful Convictions.

Ms. Callahan graduated from Loyola Law School *magna cum laude*. She was awarded the 2016 Mentor Award for outstanding achievement in mentoring lawyers at a previous firm.