



CITY BAR REPORT

News from the Bar Association of Baltimore City

The Case for Mindfulness to Manage Stress in the Legal Profession



Sam Pulver
BABC Treasurer

As lawyers, we live in a world of high stakes, intense scrutiny, and constant demands. We are expected to put in long hours, meet relentless deadlines, and to make ourselves constantly available to our clients. Even after we physically leave the office or our workspace, we continue working mentally; anticipating arguments, drafting responses in our heads, or monitoring work emails well into our personal time. This all leads to a deleterious cumulative effect on our mental health, decision-making, and overall well-being.

This constant cognitive engagement contributes to elevated stress levels, burnout, and diminished focus. Over time, it may also affect professional judgment, increase the risk of errors, and strain personal relationships. One remedy to the negative consequences that these constant demands impose upon us is the practice of mindfulness, which many view as a necessary tool for establishing a sustainable work-life

balance.

Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and aware of your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without judgment. Practicing mindfulness can promote clarity and emotional wellbeing. For lawyers, mindfulness does not require abandoning analytical thinking or reducing professional commitment. Rather, it involves recognizing when the mind is operating on autopilot and we are simply reacting to stress instead of responding thoughtfully. In practice, mindfulness helps attorneys distinguish between productive focus and unproductive rumination. It creates space between external demands and internal reactions, allowing for clearer thinking and more measured responses.

Mindfulness directly supports work-life balance by improving awareness, focus, and emotional regulation. Lawyers who practice mindfulness are better able to notice physical and mental cues of fatigue and overload. Where sustained attention is critical in legal work, mindfulness strengthens the ability to focus on a single task. Improved concentration often leads to higher-quality work completed in less time, decreasing the need for extended hours and late-night revisions.

Mindfulness can also help mitigate stress and burnout. By calming the nervous system and reducing reactivity, mindfulness helps prevent stress from accumulating unchecked. Lawyers who regularly pause to reset are better equipped to manage pressure without becoming overwhelmed.

Finally, mindfulness improves professional and personal relationships. Presence and emotional awareness enhance communication with clients, colleagues, opposing counsel and our friends and family at home. Lawyers who are grounded are more effective listeners, negotiators, and advocates, particularly in high-conflict or high-pressure situations.

When practicing mindfulness, small, consistent practices are often the most effective. Brief pauses between work tasks, intentional breathing before hearings or calls, and focused single-tasking throughout the day can significantly reduce mental fatigue. Some easy ways to begin practicing mindfulness are:

Mindful breathing – sit in a quiet place and relax, focusing on your breath moving in and out of your body. Let your awareness of everything else fall away, and when

you notice your mind wander, simply refocus your attention to your breathing. This can be done for as short as 5 – 10 minutes for quick stress relief;

Body scans – sit or lie down in a quiet space where you are undisturbed and focus on the sensations, tension or relaxation of your body parts. Many start with their toes and gradually work up, focusing on the sensation of each body part and/or limb and simply notice the feeling in that discrete area. This exercise can be done in as little as 10 minutes for positive benefits;

Box breathing – structure your breathing by slowly inhaling for four seconds, holding your breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds and holding your breath again for four seconds before repeating. This practice can help calm the mind, improve focus and ground you in the present.

Mindfulness provides lawyers with the awareness and discipline necessary to navigate demanding careers without sacrificing health, judgment, or personal fulfillment. By incorporating mindfulness into daily practice, lawyers can build careers that are not only successful,

Looking Back, Looking Ahead, and Building a Profession That Reflects Our City



YLD Chair,
Derek Van De Walle

January takes its name from Janus, the ancient Roman god of beginnings, endings, thresholds, doorways, bridges, as well as a patron of civil and social order. He is depicted with two faces: one face looking back, and one looking ahead, a reminder that every threshold connects past and future. The image fits our profession well. We inherit the history and habits of the bar, but we also shape what it becomes. As young lawyers, we stand on that threshold and carry the responsibility for what comes next.

Looking Back

We inherit a profession grounded in public trust. The law has long been a vehicle for problem-solving, advocacy, and stabilizing institutions. For much of its history, however, the profession drew from

a relatively narrow segment of society. Opportunity often followed established networks, and those networks tended to look alike. Some lawyers benefited from long-standing professional networks that eased the way forward. Others entered and advanced without those supports, often because mentors or role models who shared their background simply weren't there yet. Both realities continue to inform our profession today, and they remind us why mentorship is one of the profession's—and the YLD's—strengths.

Looking Ahead

Our responsibility is forward-looking. A more inclusive profession does not emerge by accident. Rather, it develops when lawyers are intentional about creating pathways and support. That work begins early: with students who are the first in their families to pursue law, with clerks learning professional culture for the first time, and with new lawyers still navigating the balance between competence, confidence, and workload.

Mentorship is one of the most

effective tools we have to support that growth. A single conversation explaining billing practices, courtroom expectations, or career paths can remove uncertainty that might otherwise discourage a young lawyer from moving forward. Formal programs matter, but so do the daily choices we make: inviting junior lawyers into substantive work, providing thoughtful feedback, and ensuring that credit is shared.

Exposure is equally important. When students visit courtrooms, meet practitioners, and participate in bar programming, the profession becomes concrete rather than abstract. And when young lawyers are entrusted with responsibility and given support as they learn from inevitable mistakes, they develop the competence and confidence that sustain the future leadership of the bar.

The Young Lawyers' Division is committed to helping sustain these opportunities. Our programming connects students and new lawyers with practitioners, fosters mentorship relationships, and builds community across practice

areas and backgrounds. Our goal is simple: to keep the profession's door open, and to ensure that those who walk through it are welcomed, supported, and encouraged to lead.

A Shared Obligation

Looking back helps us understand where gaps exist. Looking ahead allows us to close them. Every lawyer can make the profession more inclusive by doing what lawyers already know how to do well: show up, listen, teach, and advocate. Introduce a student to someone who may help them. Invite a junior attorney to observe a deposition. Share insight into unwritten norms. Be deliberate about who receives opportunities.

As we begin a new year, we stand at the threshold. We are grateful for the mentors and institutions that shaped us, and we are committed to building a profession that reflects the City we serve: diverse, capable, resilient, and rooted in public service. If you would like to support or participate in mentorship and inclusion initiatives within the Young Lawyers' Division, we welcome your involvement.



237 S HIGH ST BALTIMORE,
MD 21202



THE BAR ASSOCIATION OF BALTIMORE CITY EVENTS COMMITTEE PRESENTS

Baseball Night

VS

ORIOLES



ASTROS



TUESDAY APRIL 28, 2026

6:35 P.M.

CAMDEN YARDS

TICKETS \$65 - INCLUDES FOOD, DRINKS, PICNIC PERCH

PURCHASE TICKETS BY MARCH 10 AT BALTIMOREBAR.ORG

The Bar Association of Baltimore City
and Continuing Legal Education Committee Presents:
The 2026 District Court Trial Advocacy Series



During this three-part series, gain courtroom confidence and receive an introductory primer on District Court practice from sitting judges and experienced practitioners

April 15 – Strategies for Opening and Closing Arguments and Courtroom Decorum at Goodell Devries

April 22 – Presentation of Evidence and Ethics Considerations at Silverman Thompson

April 29 – Direct and Cross Examination and Impeachment at Gallagher LLP

12:00-1:30pm for all three sessions

Lunch will be included

Free to members, \$30 per session for nonmembers

Register at baltimorebar.org/ecalender

