

University of California, Davis School of Law

Externship Seminar - Wellness Exercise Guidelines and Worksheet

It's no secret that stress is endemic in the legal profession— even before a global pandemic, fraught national politics and ongoing racial tensions. While stress can be beneficial, it can also lead to significant problems, including negative work performance with serious consequences.

Learning how to manage stress and work/personal pressures in constructive and wholesome ways is necessary for your personal life and your career. Doing so will help you to achieve your job satisfaction and work/life balance goals. Your externship is an ideal setting in which to explore these issues by actually trying out different approaches and learning from those experiences. Ultimately, you want to build wellbeing into the DNA of your life and career.

Your assignment this week is to engage in 2 hours toward self-care/wellness activities. First, review your time management exercise. Are there take-aways that are useful now, such as notes on exercise, meals with family or friends, playing with your dog? Can you build on them? If you did not list any such activities in your exercise – the absence is something to explore.

You will note that this exercise focuses on the externship themes of intention and reflection. First, consider what you are doing and why you are doing it. Then, think about what you learned and how you might integrate that into your ongoing plans for wellbeing.

Use the worksheet to note your answers and have it handy to discuss during your small section meeting on November 10.

Amount of Time

The minimum time block is 15 minutes; otherwise, it is completely up to you how to use that time: Eight fifteen-minute breaks, one two-hour break, one hour/1 half hour/2 fifteen blocks. etc. I encourage you to try a combination of times. Consider and use what you learned about wellness and taking breaks during remote learning/work.

Timing

Are you a morning person? A night owl? How do those personal characteristics affect your choices? How does your home/living arrangement affect choices, such as if you are caring for a child or other relative?

Activities

You may choose any activity you like, but I encourage you try something new (at least once), rather using activities already built into your schedule. It could be no activity at all – catnaps count! Whatever you choose, however, should be something that you feel comfortable discussing in class. And consider – is it a solo activity or something with others? Do group activities tend to energize or enervate you?

Many work places have their own wellness plans/activities. If that's true of your placement, and you are asked to join in, by all means feel free to so if you like. However, consider the pros and cons of doing something that is a work-place activity versus something completely on your own. If you take part in a workplace wellness activity, note your take-aways in the worksheet.

Time Sheets

In my initial email to your supervisors, I asked them to let you count at least some of your time toward this exercise; they were overwhelmingly positive. If you do so, note the time in your bi-weekly time sheets. The amount of time should be appropriate and proportional to the total number of weekly hours at the placement.

However, you should not use this exercise to fill in your time sheet if you are falling a couple of hours short that week. Of course, you should also not choose times that conflict with deadlines, meetings, court appearances, etc.

Scheduling vs Spontaneity

One of the guiding principles of the externship class is to identify and get out of your comfort zones, and learn how to feel and deal with any ensuing uneasiness. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to play with this assignment. If you are a happy-go-lucky type who avoids planning whenever possible, see how it feels to prepare in advance: careful choice of activities, time, calendaring, etc. If, conversely, you color code intermittent deadlines on your multiple calendars – how does it feel to be more spontaneous?

Suggested Readings

There are voluminous written and other resources regarding the legal profession and well-being. Here are a few:

American Bar Association

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/well-being-in-the-legal-profession/

California Lawyers Association

<https://calawyers.org/health-and-wellness/>

The Best Lawyer You Can Be: A Guide to Physical, Mental, Emotional and Spiritual Wellness, by Stewart Levine, published by the ABA Law Practice Division 2018

<https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/12/lawyers-with-lowest-pay-report-more-happiness/>

<https://www.acc.com/sites/default/files/program-materials/upload/Duane%20Morris%20Handouts%20-%20USE%20THIS%20ONLY.pdf>

Worksheet

- How do you define wellness for yourself? What is the opposite of wellness for you?

- What activity or activities did you choose? Why did you choose them?

- What kind of activity was it: physical, mental, spiritual, etc.? What are your priorities in choosing a wellness activity?

- What time options did you choose? Which (if more than one) felt most/least effective?

- What time (or times) of morning/day/evening/night did you choose? What was most/least optimal?

- Overall, what were your takeaways from this exercise that you want to apply in the future?

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