

1 in 1,440: The Mindful Minute

A Small (Short) but Powerful Offering to Law Students

I use this method at the start of each of EBCLC's weekly doctrinal seminar classes (Community Lawyering with approximately 40-45 students). At Berkeley, clinic seminars have long been slated for Wednesday afternoons (3:35-5:25 PM)—midway through the week and toward the end of the day; for this reason, I have found that The Mindful Minute (TMM) offers a welcomed moment of respite, reprieve, centering, and mindfulness for the students, not only in connection with what might be difficult topics we will discuss in that class, but also in general, given their generally packed schedules and minds. Semester after semester, course evaluations have underscored that The Mindful Minute—just one out of the 1,440 we each have in any given day!—became a much-awaited weekly practice for my students. (It works just as well on Zoom, too!).

(I learned this classroom technique from my own supervisor and teacher, Tirien Steinbach, former Executive Director of the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC) & Lecturer-in-Residence at UC Berkeley School of Law. Tirien taught Community Lawyering for more than a decade, and also taught Mindfulness & the Law at Berkeley Law.)

The process is:

1. At our first daylong training together (dubbed EBCLC Bootcamp), I introduce the class to the technique—The Mindful Minute (TMM). I describe what it is, why we will do it, how it will work, what the options are for the students to engage with it (or not, as the case may be). Importantly, the focus of TMM is on each individual student in the room (including me, the teacher) and our collective commitment to taking one minute out of the 1,440 available in a day to ground ourselves, focus on our breath, center our mind to the task and the class ahead, and—importantly—just spend one conscious, awake moment in as neutral a mental state as possible. I usually describe how meditation and mindfulness became central and key for me in my early days as a practicing lawyer, how I used it to manage high-stress litigation moments, and how this small (short) but powerful tool is one of many in a lawyer's toolkit that can have major positive health benefits, to boot.
2. What is TMM? The Mindful Minute is a cursory tool that classroom teachers might use at the start of a class to bring everybody's focus into the task or class at hand. It works well for longer gatherings, meetings, or strategy sessions, too. TMM is especially useful for groups of people who were otherwise doing different things, experiencing greatly varied mental states, but who then came together for a set time to focus on a single problem or task—like a clinic seminar. At the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC), our 35-40 students are working semesterly with eight (8) different community-based clinics; for seminar, however, we all come together. Except for their specific EBCLC unit mates, the students in this class are therefore relatively new to one another, and this is really the only time and space (weekly, for two hours) that they are engaging

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[adapted from Tirien A. Steinbach]

together as a large group. Having them focus in on the class at hand, and be present, mindful, and respectful of one another, is important to fostering a positive, productive learning environment and I think it is imperative to engage with the sometimes difficult nature of the topics we discuss in class.

3. How does TMM Work? Students are typically coming into the classroom at 3:30 PM on a Wednesday—they are halfway through their workweek/schoolweek, and it is the end of the day. What lies ahead is the onramp to the weekend, and while I don't explicitly state that, I am well aware that it is a tough time of day to ask law students to engage thoughtfully and deeply about community lawyering. That's part of why I use TMM in this particular class, though admittedly I use them in all of my classes, to boot!
4. How I use TMM in Class:
 - a. As my 40-45 students enter the seminar classroom, they find seats and then often immediately pull out their laptops—as law students are prone (and trained) to do. Once students are settled in their seats, I greet them. Just before this, I prepare my Insight Timer App (Free version) by setting the meditation bell timer to 1 minute, that way I am ready to go with the exercise.
 - b. I invite the students to—if and as they are able—join me in reaching both of their hands up in the air for a prolonged stretch, to look up at the ceiling and crane their necks backward, and to then slowly bring both of their hands down. I model this for them because, on the way down, I invite them to use that lowering-hands-motion to also slowly but surely *close* the lids of their laptops. (This often invites a chuckle).
 - c. I take 30-45 seconds to quickly explain the exercise we'll do together:
 - i. There are 1,440 minutes in a day and so, please join me in sparing/taking/investing *one* of them for their/your/our collective well-being and focus!
 - ii. I explain that I will chime a bell at the beginning and a bell at the end, using my Insight Timer App (I show them my phone); you can also use a meditation bell, of course – but I use the app specifically because I want to show them how easy it is to carry TMM in your pocket and, quite literally, use/engage the exercise anytime, anywhere.
 - iii. During the one minute, focus on your breath – the air going in through your nose, and coming out through your mouth. I invite everybody to sit or stand with their feet flat on the floor, shoulder width apart; try to sit upright but not rigid, lift/drop shoulders a couple of times to be comfortable. I invite those who are up for it to join me in closing their eyes; otherwise, hold a soft gaze in front of you, focusing in on a specific object or just resting your gaze.
 - d. I start the timer, which rings the bell – and I usually walk/talk us through the minute – breath focus, as air goes in, feel your body lift up toward the ceiling/sky; as breath comes out feel your body root itself into the ground/floor/earth.

- e. The closing bell rings. I close by asking – raise your hand if that felt long [usually few to no hands go up]; and, raise your hand if that felt short [usually most hands go up]. If TMM felt short to you, it might indicate that you could use/benefit from more minutes of mindfulness in your day!
- f. I take a quick moment to remind them of the free app Insight Timer and encourage them to download/use it – it’s fast, easy, free, and ultimately all TMM costs each student is 1 – just one! – of the 1,440 minutes in our days!