

This booklet tells you why law school is so stressful, and why it doesn't have to be that way. It is based on the experience of two generations of law students and lawyers, many law teachers, and 20 years of scientific research on what determines whether you will be happy, anxious, or depressed.

Contents:

Healthy and Unhealthy Stress	1
Is Heavy Workload the Problem ?	2
False Values Create Constant Stress	3
The Universal Fallacy: that the Road to Happiness Runs Through the Top of the Class	4
Adaptive Values, Less Stress, Better Performance	5
Hidden Stresses of Thinking "Like a Lawyer"	7
Losing Faith in your Self	7
Losing Faith in The Law Compounds the Problem	8
Losing your Connection with Other People	8
Fear of Failure and the Increasing Illusion of Control	9
What about Mistakes?	11
Partying, Depression, and Distractions	12
Law School Debts	13
One More Professional Stress – Lying	14
Setting the Stage for a Happy and Healthy Professional Life .	15

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The Hidden Sources of Law School Stress

Law school is a highly demanding experience; that is no surprise. But the toll that law school can exact on your well-being and life satisfaction is a surprise – it is often much more severe than you expect. My purpose is to prepare you to avoid this negative impact on your life. I will discuss the few stresses that are unavoidable and, more importantly, I will point out and explain the more serious, hidden sources of law school stress. These stressors are so deeply embedded in the typical law school culture that you aren't likely to be aware of them – even when they are causing you and your classmates unnecessary pressure and anxiety. I then suggest specific actions to prevent each stressor from undermining your experience of law school and your career.

Healthy and Unhealthy Stress

The originator of the term, Dr. Hans Selye, defined stress as the physiological response to any demand on us.¹ We obviously don't need to be concerned about most stress, since life places constant demands on us and we usually remain healthy and happy. Normal stressors are not damaging because we respond to them with limited amounts of our energy and emotional reserves, and then readily recover through our normal rest, relaxation, and other routines. More challenging stressors present more intense or more sustained demands on our physical or emotional reserves. We feel tired or strained and we experience a greater need for rest or emotional relief. The most threatening stressors overtax our systems acutely, persistently, or both, and thereby deplete our personal reserves. They cause fatigue, depression, and, ultimately, burnout and functional breakdown.

Depression and other symptoms of excessive stress are all too common among law students and lawyers,² so attention is necessary to maintain your health and enjoyment of life. The purpose of this booklet is prevention. The key is to learn to recognize the most significant, potentially harmful demands, eliminate any that you can, and moderate your response to those that are unavoidable. The next section will help you accomplish these goals. It identifies and discusses the stressors most common to the law school experience. Two of them are largely unavoidable – heavy work load and high debt load – but you will learn how to moderate the stress that they create. Beyond that, you will see that many other stresses in law school are more intense than work load or debt load, and they all involve either bad information or skewed priorities. You will therefore learn how to *eliminate or greatly reduce the most taxing stresses by addressing the attitudes and false information that fuel them*. Let's take a look

Law School Stressors

A. Is Heavy Workload the Problem ?

This is a realistic stressor, especially for first year students. Law school is likely to live up to its reputation for a steady diet of challenging assignments. However, *all of us have engaged in hard work before, and usually with positive rather than negative results*. Strong, focused effort usually produces positive feelings like satisfaction, achievement, and self worth, while normal rest neutralizes the fatigue we might feel after hard work.

So why does the workload in law school produce so much stress? If the work seems excessively wearing, something beyond hard work is probably affecting you. The likeliest candidates are (1) confused priorities that cause you to ignore the most basic personal needs like rest, exercise, sensible diet, or social and family time; and (2) unrealistic or unhealthy attitudes that result in you feeling tense, anxious, discouraged, or depressed about your school work. If you read the following section and find that you are overwhelmed despite having the adaptive attitudes and priorities discussed there, then look carefully to be sure you are using your time well.³

Antidote: *If you feel persistently fatigued or stressed, know that it is likely not the heavy workload. It is more likely that your attitudes (and anxieties) about the possible results, coupled with life style distortions, are wearing you out physically and emotionally. Do not abandon common sense about your personal needs just because there is more competition from better students in your class than previously. Keep your priorities straight, and identify beliefs that make you anxious or tend to overwork. The next section will help.*

B. False Values Create Constant Stress

You are all accustomed to relative success in the previous chapters of your life, and you may feel more pressure to succeed now than ever before. There has been so much attention on your admission to law school, and you, your parents, and your friends all have high expectations that you want to live up to. You may already have a vision of an exciting legal career waiting for you, but it may be clouded by your uncertainty about getting the necessary grades to land the job. At the same time, you know competition will be intense because the students competing with you are, on average, more capable than before. Your entire class shares the pressure to be in that exclusive Top Ten Percent (and to be invited to law review), and you all know that ninety percent of you can not succeed in this endeavor.

The preceding paragraph identifies many of the common attitudes that create unnecessary stress and depression throughout law school (you may want to reread it). If you allow these concerns to dominate your thinking, your studies are fraught with anxiety and unease about your worth, your future, and your job prospects. It is as if your whole life is riding on your grades. And this persistent insecurity in turn can create much more stress, by causing you to overwork and abandon your life balance. On the other hand, if you learn to eliminate this mental pressure, the hard work of your law studies will create only reasonable demands on your personal reserves, and you will experience the natural enjoyment and satisfaction inherent in learning. The following discussion will help you eliminate this stress, by explaining why the assumptions on which it is based are false.

The Universal Fallacy: that the road to happiness runs through the top of the class

Fortunately, all of the pressure-laden feelings and beliefs discussed above are based on bad information and on false assumptions about life and career satisfaction. It is practically a “given” that great success – top grades, high salary, or a prestigious job represent the fast track to happiness. This pervasive belief is false.⁴ I will explain why it is false, and if you can accept that it is false you will immediately experience less pressure and stress. You will also be less likely to make choices that can undermine your future life and career.

Scientific research for the past 15 years has consistently shown that a primary focus on external rewards and results, including affluence, fame, and power, is unfulfilling. These values are seductive – they create a nice picture of life but they are actually correlated with relative unhappiness. Instead, people who have a more “intrinsic,” personal/interpersonal focus – on personal growth, close relationships, helping others, or improving their community – turn out to be significantly happier and more satisfied with their lives.⁵

The majority of lawyers by definition come from the middle of their law school classes, and many outstanding lawyers did not stand out in law school. (Note: Do not misread this and slack off – work hard and do your very best academically!) It is true that higher grades will get you more interviews for high-paying jobs more easily, but this does not mean that high grades necessarily translate into a more satisfying career as a lawyer. When interviews are open only to people with high class ranks, consider whether the extrinsic criterion (class standing) indicates an employer that may overemphasize extrinsic values at the work place. Also, for some positions, high pay means that you need to generate high revenue for your employer, and that pressure can create challenges to your integrity or your ethics.⁶ A more common concern is that your personal happiness may take a back seat, because many such jobs require so many work hours that you will have little or no outside life. And high pay does not mean that you will enjoy the work – probably the most important consideration for life satisfaction. So, while grades should certainly be a factor in motivating your best effort in law school, be clear that *(1) salary does not define a desirable job, and (2) most people get good jobs with average grades.*

Do not gloss over the preceding conclusions; they are crucial to minimizing your present stress and anxiety, and to maximizing your future career satisfaction. They are also supported by additional research on motivation and happiness. Just as intrinsic goals or values will increase your level of satisfaction, the proper motivation for your goals (the reason *why* you make those choices) further increases the positive effect on your life experience. Research shows that there are only two motivations for choosing work (or other actions) that will promote your life satisfaction: you either inherently *enjoy the process* of doing that work, or the work *supports a fundamental value* or makes a higher goal possible. These two “internal” motivators produce happy, satisfied people. There are many other familiar motivations – gaining money and luxury, pleasing or impressing other people, avoiding feelings of guilt or fear, and obtaining power, influence, or fame. These motivations are all considered “external,” and choices made primarily for any of these reasons have been shown to lead to dissatisfaction and frustration.⁷

Adaptive values, less stress, better performance

It obviously makes sense to orient yourself toward the intrinsic (personal/interpersonal) values and internal motivators, because they are associated with well-being. And there are other important and practical reasons why you should choose such values and motivations. First, they *eliminate the stress that often accompanies work or study*, and second, they *enable you to perform better academically*. These values and motivations eliminate stress because they promote the experience of satisfaction during the process of working, rather than tension about the results that may accrue; and they provide further stress relief because their orientation is not competitive. This means that the choices you make based on internal values and motives will be within your control to achieve with reasonable effort. For example, if you primarily seek to do your best, improve yourself and your community, and be caring or respectful towards other people, you will be able to attain those goals and hence you create only manageable demands on your system. In contrast, if you need to be at the top of the class, out-perform other very intelligent students, get a certain job, etc., you will be stressed because these outwardly-focused goals are not readily within your personal control. Such outcomes are unpredictable, and will depend on what other people do and think at least as much as on your own actions. While it is fine to work towards

such things as preferred outcomes, if you make them your primary goals you will create anxiety and an emotional roller coaster for yourself.

In addition to enjoying your work more and experiencing less anxiety, you will maximize your academic performance by choosing personal/ interpersonal values and internal motives over external, competitive goals. For example, if you set learning goals instead of grade goals, you will derive more satisfaction from your effort and will learn more effectively.⁸ Working in well-structured collaborative study groups instead of exclusively on your own will enhance these positive effects – you will learn more, learn better and enjoy learning more. Two keys to group effectiveness are: the members of the group invest themselves in the success of the others in the group, and members hold themselves and each other accountable for contributing to the group work.⁹

Outside pressures and expectations

You may well be feeling additional pressure from family and friends who expect you to obtain the highest grades and a prestigious job. As we've seen, the motivation research suggests that you give these expectations and pressures little attention. Pleasing others will not make you happy. You need to spend your life fulfilling your own dreams, not those of someone else. So, be loving toward those parents and friends, but remain clear within yourself about your own values and sources of work satisfaction.

Antidotes: *Recognize that the intense needs for high grades and salaries are based on false information and are unlikely to produce happiness, even for the most “successful.”¹⁰ When you start feeling that you must have the grades and make the salary, remind yourself that these are false beliefs, even if family and friends believe them. Be wise – prefer goals and motives that will actually produce happiness in your life. Identify your core values and work towards them. Focus on non-competitive, achievable goals like doing your best and learning as much as you can, rather than on goals like doing better than others or pleasing/ impressing other people. Such goals are unattainable,*

unpredictable, or beyond your control, and they create anxiety that then obstructs your optimal performance.

Remind yourself regularly to lean toward intrinsic values such as developing yourself, building your relationships and your communities of interest, and being of service to others, rather than emphasizing rewards and material results. The latter results will come of their own accord, but they do not work as ends in themselves. And when it is time to look for a job, remember that this is your life. Don't try to fulfill someone else's values or desires for you. The only demonstrated bases for choosing work that will satisfy you are: will I enjoy doing the work itself? And does this work mean something to me – does it fit and further my core values?

C. Hidden Stresses of Thinking “Like a Lawyer”

Few of us realize the several levels of stress that learning to “think like a lawyer” can present. Most immediately, many of you will feel the natural tension about learning anything new and challenging, perhaps compounded by “Paper Chase”-type fears of the Socratic method, harsh instructors, or overly intense classes. This level of angst usually recedes quickly as you become accustomed to law classes. But a variety of more subtle and more critical challenges to your comfort and well-being lurk around this process.

Losing faith in your self

Thinking “like a lawyer” involves mastering the analytical function, including recognizing relevant legal principles and applying them to factual situations. Your clarity of thinking and problem-solving skill will improve, which are both strong benefits. But at the same time, your pre-existing beliefs, values, preferences, and your feelings and emotions will not be engaged in this analysis. Much of your apparent success in class will depend on displaying the relatively narrow analytical skill, often to the exclusion of everything else. The first potential problem is that students begin to discount or ignore their beliefs, feelings, and values as if they no longer matter. This is a huge mistake, because it eliminates the sense of who you

are that has developed throughout your life. The result is that law students often feel “lost,” or that something important is missing, and indeed it is if you become disconnected from your personal values, preferences, and feelings.

Losing faith in The Law compounds the problem

As classes proceed, you may also feel disillusioned to learn that the law is far from fixed in its meaning, and can be used to reach results you feel are wrong, unjust, or simply unpredictable or illogical. Instead of learning how to discover The Answer, as you probably expected from law school, you learn that very often the best answer amounts to describing many possible outcomes (perhaps ranked by their likelihood and level of arguable support) after identifying the relevant facts, principles, competing legal rules, judicial philosophies and biases, and differences in authority among various jurisdictions. Indeed, you will be learning the precise skills that lawyers can use to shade the law in favor of virtually any position a client might prefer. If you begin to ignore your sense of right and wrong, even outrage in appropriate situations, in order to rationalize any possible outcome, you will dampen the ideals and values that brought you to law school in the first place. Psychologists believe that such an effect undermines the personality, and we did find this effect in our research on law students.¹¹

When lawyers act unprofessionally or immorally, it is generally the result of such a disconnection from their personal values, conscience, or purpose.¹² We have already seen that values and meaningful motivation are crucial to life satisfaction. When these diminish, anxiety and depression will naturally increase, and you also become ripe for the dishonest behavior that forms a part of the negative lawyer stereotype. (See the section below on lying for more about this.) If you do choose to literally become “like a lawyer” in this narrow sense – to act as a “hired gun” by using, even manipulating, the law to further values you don’t respect – expect huge distortions in your personality and the proportional experience of personal distress.

Losing your connection with other people

There is at least one more major problem: Thinking “like a lawyer” trains you to look for weaknesses, counter your opponent’s

position, and defend your own. Thus you learn to be critical and aggressive/defensive. It is easy to become absorbed in learning and displaying these new skills, and you may find your personality shifting in this way as well. Be alert: Are you becoming more critical, intolerant or aggressive in everyday activities and in your personal relationships? If so, you will like yourself less, others will like you less, your relationships will erode, and these key foundations of your life satisfaction will disappear.¹³

Antidotes: *While you are learning to think “like a lawyer,” be very clear that this is a legal skill but not a life skill. In situations that don’t call for strict legal analysis, continue to be who you were when you came to law school. It is fine to exercise the clearer thinking/problem solving abilities you have learned, but be careful to also maintain a lively appreciation for your instincts, values, conscience, and feelings in your dealings throughout each day. They matter, even in class or other situations where you often might not articulate them. Stay connected to yourself! And watch the way you relate to others. Be kind, and be attentive to leave the critical, adversarial style in the classroom or practice court. If you “become” this person you will suffer the degradation of your self esteem and relationships, and your life satisfaction will fall accordingly. Instead, liken your learning of analytical and debating skills to learning to weld or to use some other powerful tool. Use the torch only when actually welding, and then leave it in the shop to cool down. It can be destructive elsewhere.*

D. Fear of Failure and the Increasing Illusion of Control

Some students feel stress around the awesome responsibilities of lawyers, and worry about the possibility of failing a future client. While taking a responsible approach to work or study is important, when responsibility creates a need to control events or outcomes it becomes unrealistic and begins generating unmanageable stress. The need for

high grades and the like is a related experience that most students are already familiar with. Many of you arrive for law school orientation with control “issues” already in hand because you are accustomed to, and expect to continue, your record of outperforming other students. Realize now: *You do not have the ability to control much beyond your own attitudes, thoughts, and actions.* If you are not clear about this, spend a few minutes making a list of things outside yourself that you can control, and see if there is anything really significant on the list.

In previous school settings this personal sphere of control was probably sufficient to produce your desired outcome – academic excellence; but as you compete with more capable students in law school and encounter much more complex situations in law practice, your ability to control outcomes decreases proportionately. If you do not moderate your expectations to realistically match your decreasing ability to control events, your stress will also be out of control and your anxiety level will increase markedly. You may be noticing this already, as many students do early in law school.

Compounding this problem, your sensed need to control is likely to get an unwelcome boost from your classroom experience. Based on the indeterminacy of the law, your developing skills of persuasion, and the level of mastery of your teachers in their subject areas, students often infer that a good lawyer should be able to produce the outcome any client desires. Perhaps no one will tell you otherwise, but this is an unrealistic, impossible expectation, particularly if your practice involves litigation.

The reality of actual events, trial judges, juries, and interested parties is very different from the more wide-ranging, theoretical discussions of the classroom. You can not control the law that will determine the case, nor can you control the facts of a case without employing lies or other distorting tactics. Indeed, the facts and the controlling law are generally fixed well before your client even makes his or her first contact with you. You also cannot control the motives, preferences, or behavior of your client, adverse counsel, her client, or the judge or jury if the case reaches that stage.

You can certainly *influence* many stages of the case with the few things you can control – your good research and preparation, respectful and

forthright dealing with all persons, and clear presentation of the facts, law, and argument in the light favorable to your cause. However, be clear that this influence rarely matches the combined influence that the actual facts, existing law, and biases of the judge or jury will have on the outcome. So while you should always feel pressure to do the best work that you can, it is equally important to remember that events will then take their course based on your work and the many other factors you cannot control. If you realize and accept the realistic limits of your sphere of control, your stress and anxiety levels will diminish greatly.

What about mistakes?

Beyond trying to control the uncontrollable, there is the question of falling short of your best presentation, making a mistake, or having a bad day. These are all part of the human experience, and don't expect a law degree to change that. Even when you have done well, there is the tendency to think of a better way to have done something when it is over; hindsight gives all kinds of opportunities for self-critique. Do your best, learn from your experiences, but don't expect to do things perfectly.

Antidotes: *Have reasonable expectations for yourself, both in law school and beyond. Mistakes are rarely critical to the outcome of a case, but they can be and they do happen. Accept that possibility, while developing a strong work ethic to minimize errors. Become clear about the very few things that you can control, like that work ethic, your decency, and your integrity; and be sure to do your best, within reason, in those areas. Then practice accepting gracefully the many things you can't control, which often include results and outcomes. Learn to trust that once you have done your best, stressing about the rest is simply that – stressing. It can also be a great help to develop faith in something beyond your own intelligence and ability, because you, like everyone else, will find that things often do not turn out as you or your client prefer. This does not mean that you have failed; it is much more likely the result of the facts, the law of the case, and the many other people involved.*

E. Partying, Depression, and Distractions

Maintaining a fulfilling, if somewhat curtailed social life is a key to staying balanced in law school. But don't leave your common sense behind. You may be attracted to drinking and partying to relieve the tension of the law school "grind." Some students overeat, overspend or become increasingly devoted to television, video games, gambling, and other distractions; some want to sleep more than usual. Be alert and take action if you see these behaviors increasing: they actually increase your stress level and they generally mask other problems. There are common-sense, positive ways to relieve stress, including walks, hobbies, sports, yoga, massage, and meals or movies with friends. Remember that if that much tension is building up during the week, the work of law school is not the cause – it is more likely the attitudes, anxieties, and self-imposed pressures discussed previously. Without changing those attitudes, no amount of 'blowing off steam' or ignoring the problems will work.

There are two other key concerns about partying and other distracting behaviors. First, are you using the rigors of law school to rationalize drug use or excessive drinking? If so, you have company, and these behaviors don't go away on their own. Substance abuse is very often a contributing factor when lawyers lose their licenses, so catch it and deal with it now. Second, there is a close relationship between substance use and depression, basically a cycle in which each exacerbates the other and causes a spiral of increasing substance use and depressed moods. And regardless of any alcohol or drug use, if you are sleeping excessively or sporadically, or finding reasons not to do your work or go to class, these can be signs of depression¹⁴ that need positive and immediate attention. If you think you might have a depression or substance problem, seek confidential help through a counselor, 12-step program, or Lawyer Assistance program (call 866-529-5277 for a confidential inquiry).¹⁵

Antidotes: *If you are stressed, depressed, or resorting to drinking or similar behavior, deal with it directly. Do not distract yourself and do not procrastinate; these problems tend to be progressive. Try to take a hard look at your behaviors and the attitudes that underlie them. And watch out for two dangerous tendencies common to law students and lawyers: isolation and excessive self-reliance.*

Improvement is more likely and more rapid with expert assistance, and confidential help is widely available. Be wise and deal constructively with counterproductive beliefs and behaviors now; trying to “manage” your stress through damaging or distracting behaviors will result in a very unpleasant life.

F. Law School Debts

The high debt load of most law students is similar to the heavy workload of law school. Both are genuine factors to be reckoned with, but neither, of itself, will prove to be an unmanageable stress. The facts are that many of you will have significant law school debt, and that you will pay it off over time. But if you don't keep your priorities clear, debt (like the workload) can become a constant source of worry and stress.

For starters, don't depress yourself with unrealistically dark expectations about paying off debt. Investigate payoff options early; the choices can be surprisingly flexible. One of my former students with combined college and law school debt of \$100,000 is paying \$250 per month and is pursuing his dream of public interest work on a comfortable budget.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is just as important not to create unnecessary stress by “living large” on borrowed money during school. Absolutely avoid credit card debt and buying “on time” – each generates high interest, an overspending habit, and mounting debt pressure in your life. Everything matters when you have little or no income. For example, buying two cups of fancy espresso or latte each day instead of coffee will increase your debt by about \$4,000 over three years of law school. Buying lunch instead of bringing it most days pushes that unnecessary debt up to about \$8,000! Apply this kind of thinking to all of your lifestyle decisions¹⁷ – keep it simple during your student years.

Regardless of your ultimate debt level, be clear that debt should not drive your career choice. Unfortunately, law students often use their debts to justify abandonment of the desire to help people or to “make a difference” that brought them to law school in the first place. If that happens, your entire life will be skewed in the wrong direction, toward extrinsic values and a career that you simply will not like.

Antidotes: (1) *First do everything you can to be frugal during law school; keep your debts to an absolute minimum. Get financial counseling early for this purpose and to understand payoff options. Lower debt will produce less worry now and will help keep your job options open after graduation.* (2) *Once you are doing your best to be responsible, decide to not worry about the future. Worry accomplishes nothing, but it will wear you down.* (3) *When it does come time for the job search, remember what creates happiness: doing what you enjoy, and doing what is meaningful within your value system. If you allow school loans to push you into higher-paying work that doesn't fit you, you will essentially be wasting your life. Keep debts as low as possible, and if your choices turn out to be enjoyable, meaningful work or higher pay and faster loan payoff, choose enjoyable, meaningful work.*

G. One More Professional Stress — Lying

As you move through law school and approach your career, there is one more caution: be alert for any tendency to be less than honest. We need to be aware of that negative lawyer stereotype. Most lawyers, of course, do not lie; but this is a genuine concern, so start thinking about it now.¹⁸ For our purposes here, there are two key points: (1) many practice situations can tempt you to lie; and (2) lying is enormously stressful.

The temptations can come up in many ways. You might tell yourself you are only “shading” or “stretching” the facts of your case or the work you have done. You will have opportunities to make false statements directly or to condone them through your client or others. Other lawyers may even help you rationalize various forms of lying with justifications like “zealous advocacy”, “de minimus”, “agency”, “duty”, “role”, or “expediency.”

Lying is so stressful because it directly breaks your integrity. If you engage in lying, the dissonance it creates within your personality will make you feel sick (if you are paying attention). And over time it will

literally make you sick – emotionally, physically, or both.¹⁹ One modern psychologist observes that *lying is the major source of all human stress. Lying kills people.*²⁰ Don't do it, and don't kid yourself that lying in any form – or for that matter, manipulating, intimidating, or any other behavior your common sense would tell you is wrong – is actually all right once you minimize it with a rationale or a legal label, because then you're lying to yourself as well.

Antidote: *Based on the preceding discussion of law school stresses, you are already thinking about the importance of staying well connected to the things that define you, such as your values, ideals, and personal beliefs and preferences. Now add your conscience, feelings and common sense to the list. They will protect you from the temptation to begin lying in practice settings or elsewhere. It is all about the overall integrity of your functioning. It is just as important to protect the integrity of your personality by being honest and respecting your conscience, instincts and values, as it is to protect the integrity of your body by avoiding injuries or toxic food. Ultimately it is the same integrity, and your health depends on it.*

Setting the Stage for a Happy and Healthy Professional Life

Most new law students report some level of awareness that lawyers are experiencing high rates of depression, career dissatisfaction, and alcohol or drug abuse.²¹ It can be discouraging to see the statistics, but if you have read this booklet carefully, you already understand why these problems would arise among lawyers. Like law school, practicing law is very demanding, and lawyers may take their critical thinking and adversarial skills home or to the soccer game with them. Many lawyers also make those mistakes regarding priorities, putting too much emphasis on winning, getting ahead, making money, and living the affluent life, while losing their life balance and sense of who they are in the process. And that final mistake, beginning to lie, most often occurs as a result of the pressure imposed by these skewed priorities and values. So spend the

time and attention to learn these lessons now about the stresses of law school – they also prepare you to have a healthy and balanced life as a lawyer.

As we close, you should feel encouraged. Law school and law practice can provide you with the best of professional lives, but you do have to be realistic. Most people don't talk about the problems that we have discussed because it is uncomfortable to do so. Unfortunately, the problems have persisted. You should congratulate yourself for reading this booklet. As a result, you know how to recognize and avoid major stressors that arise from counterproductive attitudes, extrinsic values, or skewed priorities. You also know how to moderate the more obvious, unavoidable stresses like work load and debt load. Resolve yourself to adopt the attitudes and practices suggested here, despite the fact that they may seem contrary to the prevailing thinking.²² It will help if you remind yourself that the research is all one way: the right goals, values, and attitudes are crucial for your happiness and career satisfaction.

It's really quite straightforward. If you confront these issues thoughtfully now, you will improve your law school experience and you will set yourself up for a more satisfying life and career. I'd say "Good luck," but it's actually not about luck. You know what you need to know to get started in the right direction. Use the information well, explore further, and build the support you need to stay on track.²³ Make good decisions for yourself. The result will be an enjoyable, meaningful, and healthful life, both in law school and throughout your career.

When you are ready to focus on career issues, the companion booklet, [Straight Talk About Your Career Choices](#), will guide you towards a satisfying job.

For additional readings and related information visit:

http://www.law.fsu.edu/academic_programs/humanizing_lawschool.php

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Endnotes

¹ HANS SELYE, *THE STRESS OF LIFE*, 64 (1956).

² Stress is the most highly correlated predictor of depression, and lawyers are the most frequently depressed occupational group in the United States. William Eaton, et. al., *Occupations and the Prevalence of Major Depressive Disorder*, 32 J. OCCUPATIONAL MED. 1079 (1990) Depression is also a definite concern in law school. The most focused study to date found that new law students begin with normal levels of depression (about 9% of the sample), but rise to about 30% incidence of depression in the first year. By the end of law school about 40% of the students were measurably depressed. G. Andrew H. Benjamin, et. al., *The Role of Legal Education in Producing Psychological Distress Among Law Students and Lawyers*, AM. B. FOUND. RES. J. 225 (1986).

³ If this is the case, explore calendaring and other techniques to improve your time management. Effective and straightforward advice is readily available from books, teachers or professionals; go after it.

⁴ Consistent with previous studies, our recent study found no correlation between grades and well-being. Kennon M. Sheldon and Lawrence S. Krieger, *Does Legal Education Have Undermining Effects on Law Students? Evaluating Changes in Motivation, Values, and Well-Being*, 22 BEHAV. SCI. & LAW 261 (2004). We actually found that high g.p.a. may predict lower future career satisfaction. See note 10 *infra*.

⁵ See, e.g., Tim Kasser and Richard M. Ryan, *A Dark Side of the American Dream: Correlates of Financial Success as a Central Life Aspiration*, 65 J. PERS. & SOC. PSYCHOL. 410 (1993), and *Further Examining the American Dream: Differential Correlates of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Goals*, 22 PERS. & SOC. PSYCH. BULL. 281 (1996). We have extended these studies of general populations to entering law students, with the same finding.

⁶ Every law student should read this article to understand how the wrong work environment can corrode your life quality and personal integrity: Patrick J. Schiltz, *On Being a Happy, Healthy, and Ethical Member of an Unhappy, Unhealthy, and Unethical Profession*, 52 VAND. L. REV. 871 (1999). See also Thomas D. Morgan, *Creating a Life as a Lawyer*, 38 VALP. L. REV. 37 (2004), and Sheldon and Krieger, *supra* note 4.

⁷ For a summary of this research, see Lawrence S. Krieger, *Institutional Denial About the Dark Side of Law School, and Fresh Empirical Guidance for Constructively Breaking the Silence*, 52 J. LEGAL EDUC. 112, 120-122 (2002).

⁸ Michael Hunter Schwartz, *Teaching Law Students to Be Self-Regulated Learners*, MICH. ST. DCL L. REV. 447, 479-480 (2003).

⁹ MICHAEL HUNTER SCHWARTZ, EXPERT LEARNING FOR LAW STUDENTS, 141-145 (2003); and see *supra* note 8. Professor Schwartz's text provides many strategies for reducing distress, maximizing your performance, and improving your experience of law school. They include, for example, ways to establish a sense of control over your learning, get desired feedback from professors, and

establish an effective schedule for study.

¹⁰ In fact, our empirical findings suggest that the higher ranking students may lean towards less satisfying careers. These students initially entered law school with the most intrinsic, community-oriented values, (which, as in this sample, typically correlate with strong academic performance). However, these students then shifted toward career preferences that are more likely to produce dissatisfaction and frustration. Sheldon and Krieger, *supra* note 4 at 281.

¹¹ We found that all valuing decreased consistently throughout law school in our law students, compounded by a disproportionate initial drop in the healthy “intrinsic” values. Sheldon and Krieger, *supra* note 4 at 282.

¹² Professor Ann Iijima has written an article explaining many of the problems discussed here in terms of loss of intrapersonal (internal) and interpersonal connectedness. *Lessons Learned, Legal Education and Law Student Dysfunction*, 48 J. LEGAL EDUC. 524 (1998).

¹³ In fact, self-esteem and relatedness to others are the fundamental human needs most closely correlated with a sense of well-being. See Kennon M. Sheldon, et. al., *What is Satisfying About Satisfying Events? Testing 10 Candidate Psychological Needs*, 80 J. PERS. & SOC. PSYCHOL. 325 (2001).

¹⁴ Like substance abuse, depression is potentially very serious. Don't let it develop; use the prevention approach and consult with a professional as soon as you become aware of any of these symptoms more than very occasionally: feeling “down,” sad, tense, anxious or irritable; feeling isolated from friends, family, professors or other students; having headaches or tension in head, face, chest or abdomen; experiencing changes in body weight or eating habits; having problems sleeping; persistently worrying about school, health, or the future; experiencing breakdown of personal relationship(s); losing self-confidence or trust in others; or losing interest in, or enjoyment of, school or personal activities.

¹⁵ Investigate a possible problem right away. Even if you are only wondering whether you may have a substance or depression issue, this call will direct you to the confidential Lawyer/Law Student Assistance program in your area. Or locate these programs at: <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/colap/lapdirectory.html>

¹⁶ This student always smiles when he talks about his work. I know many other graduates who earn much more but suffer daily from their decision to forgo their service desires for financial reasons. One who struggled with the job decision, between service he cared about and a much higher salary told me flatly, “I loved every day at the (agency) office. Now I just hate waking up, thinking about another day at this job.”

¹⁷ Professor Maura Flood also suggests: Keep housing expenses low in a modest home and by living with roommates. If available, share a

membership with other students in a warehouse-type store, and/or use a food coop for bulk purchases. Forgo the expensive vacations and fancy clothes for now. Live close to school or along a bus line, and if you need a car buy a used, economical one.

¹⁸ My litigation experience and the reports of my clinical students over the years confirm that dishonesty among lawyers can be a problem. Parodies like the movie *Liar Liar* are both funny and sad because of these practices, and there are serious books on the subject as well, such as *WHY LAWYERS (AND THE REST OF US) LIE AND ENGAGE IN OTHER REPUGNANT BEHAVIOR*, by Mark Perlmutter (1998). For a first-hand account of how this habit can develop in some young lawyers, see Schiltz, *supra* note 6.

¹⁹ Health depends on, and might even be best defined as, a high degree of integrated functioning of the body, mind, and emotions. This interplay is constant, which is why emotional distress so quickly creates physical symptoms and causes so many other illnesses.

²⁰ BRAD BLANTON, *RADICAL HONESTY*, xxv (1996).

²¹ See generally Schiltz, *supra* note 6, for a summary of studies and articles.

²² See Krieger, *supra* note 7.

²³ You can do much of this on your own, but finding or building support makes the process more enjoyable and can be very helpful for keeping your life and career goals in focus. Find or form a group of like-minded students. Consult with a faculty member who is concerned about these issues, a counselor, or a member of the clergy. Be aware of internet groups of lawyers and law students that are creatively committed to making the law a satisfying calling, either through a traditional position or through less traditional work like dispute resolution or restorative justice. You can explore the Humanizing Legal Education website for articles, information, and links to other resources: http://www.law.fsu.edu/academic_programs/humanizing_lawschool.php

You will find, for example, links to Professor Susan Daicoff's web site, which documents the many directions of modern thinking within the profession, and to *Renaissance Lawyer Society*, <http://www.renaissancelawyer.com> which organizes web and telephone discussions among law students and lawyers interested in balanced, personally satisfying law careers.