

THE LAW STUDENT'S GUIDE TO DOING WELL AND BEING WELL

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Doing Well

— AND —

Being Well

SHAILINI JANDIAL GEORGE



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*For my parents, whose love I miss deeply.
For my children, whose love sustains me.*

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Gifts from students, although they are the ones who inspire me.

Preface

(or, allow me to introduce myself)

I'd like to tell you a little bit about why I am writing this book. I have been teaching legal writing at Suffolk University Law School for 17 years. You are probably either in such a class or have recently completed one, so you know how much work is involved, both for you and for me. My students tell me the class is challenging and that I have high expectations. I tell them that their employers will have high expectations and that my job is to prepare them.

To help understand how to maximize learning in law school, I research and write on the topics of learning, distraction, and mindfulness. This research revealed that not only do law students and lawyers face challenges to learning and focus, and a lack of knowledge about brain health, but they also face a growing wellness crisis. As I researched these topics, the deep connection between brain health and wellness became apparent and inspired this book. I mean “do well” in maximizing your brain’s potential, and “be well” in the process.

Maybe I shouldn't tell you this before you read the book, but I am not writing on these topics because I am totally on top of all of this wellness stuff, a queen of focus, or perpetually in a state of

Zen. Rather, I have had significant personal upheaval over the last couple of years — big, life changing events. Not to get too personal, but my normally stable world crumbled. And then, of course, came the pandemic. To top things off, just as I was settling into my sabbatical to work on this book, I got hit by a car while riding my bike. The hits — literally — just kept coming. Through it all, people kept asking me — how was I handling all the stress in my life? I was so busy just getting through my days I didn't give it much thought. But now as I write this, I have come to realize that some of the healthy habits I cultivated over the years were my safety net and new social connections my support. I had already planned to spend my sabbatical writing on the topic of brain health and law student wellbeing. What I didn't realize is how much I relied on and needed these resources myself — both to help me focus and work with all I had to deal with — but also, for my own wellness. I hope that you, too, will find that building these habits will provide you a safety net and support as you navigate the demands of law school and then practice. That is, I hope this book will help you both do well and be well.

Introduction

*(or, your thoughts are worth
way more than a penny)*

Lawyers and law students use their brains to produce value. Clients rely on us to think, analyze, argue, persuade, creatively solve problems, and more. Literally, we are paid to think. But have you ever considered how to create the conditions for your brain to perform its best, for you to think deeply and clearly, to be in your best cognitive condition? If you were a violinist, you would ensure that your violin was properly maintained to create the best chance of excelling in your performance. Since your brain is your tool, so to speak, shouldn't you do what it takes to sharpen it? The same way musicians would tune their instruments, or chefs would sharpen their knives, you must sharpen your mind. Law students and lawyers also face a wellbeing crisis. Luckily, tools that promote brain health also promote overall physical and mental wellbeing. By maximizing your brain's potential and working on your wellness, you will not only care for yourself, but be better prepared to help your clients as well.

To help you in this process, this book discusses:

- How to cultivate the ability to deeply focus and deal with the challenges of the 24/7 digital age.
- How stress affects both brain and body.
- How increasing resilience helps deal with challenges and setbacks.
- Why we need exercise for mental, physical, and brain health.
- Why adequate sleep is important and how we can improve our sleep.
- How what we eat affects our brains and physical performance.

While I have separated the material into chapters, you will soon see that each of the core elements depend upon and reinforce each other. Each chapter ends with a self-reflection. I encourage you to take the time to do each reflection as that effort can help you take the material in this book and consciously begin implementing its suggestions into your life.