

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

P U B L I C A T I O N



2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



ALSA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to elders both past, present and emerging. We reaffirm our commitments to reconciliation and aboriginal justice.

ALSA also recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons experience anxiety, depression and stress at higher rates than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to ongoing discrimination and disenfranchisement. ALSA vehemently disagrees with policies that discriminate and cause mental, physical, or emotional harm to Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

CONTENT WARNING

This publication contains material that deals with mental illness which some readers may find distressing. If this publication raises any concerns and you need urgent help, please use these resources or speak to a trusted health professional.

If this publication raises any concerns and you need urgent help, please use these resources:

Lifeline

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lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue

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beyondblue.org.au

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MENTAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

Beyond Blue

- [beyondblue.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- 1300 22 4636
- Anyone feeling anxious or depressed

Kids Helpline

- [kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au)
- 1800 55 1800
- Counselling for young people aged 5-25

MensLine Australia

- [mensline.org.au](https://www.mensline.org.au)
- 1300 78 99 78
- Men with emotional or relationship

Lifeline

- [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au)
- 13 11 14
- Anyone having a personal crisis

Mind Australia

- [mindaustralia.org.au](https://www.mindaustralia.org.au)
- 1300 286 463
- Video or telephone support services

Mental Health Australia

- [mhasustralia.org](https://www.mhasustralia.org)
- (02) 6285 3100
- For information/advice on mental health

Suicide Call Back Service

- [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)
- 1300 659 467
- Anyone thinking about suicide

Black Dog

- [blackdoginstitute.org.au](https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)
- 9382 4530
- Anyone seeking help about mental health

Headspace

- [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)
- (03) 9027 0100
- Free online support and counselling

Sane

- [sane.org](https://www.sane.org)
- 1800 18 7263
- Free call service for all things mental health

Wellways

- [wellways.org](https://www.wellways.org)
- 1300 111 500
- Free, confidential phone service that provides mental health support/referral advice



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Foreword

Dr Rachael Field

**Professor of Law
Bond University**

Being a lawyer is interesting, wonderful, challenging, fulfilling. There are so many diverse and positive ways to be a lawyer, and all lawyers make important contributions to society – upholding the rule of law, advocating for rights, accountability and justice, helping people. It is also true, however, that legal practice in all its forms can be stressful. Legal matters are often high stakes for clients, risks need to be managed, problems need to be fixed or prevented. Clients are often difficult, demanding, and unreasonable. They can have high expectations that aren't always easy to manage. There are many different stressors that lawyers have to deal with, starting at law school. On top of this, lawyering occurs in a world challenged by Covid, financial crises and war.

A large body of scholarly research, internationally, has long established that a significant proportion of law students and lawyers experience elevated levels of psychological distress. Experiencing psychological distress is problematic in terms of the efficacy of learning at law school and the quality of legal practice. We need to address this issue for the wellbeing of individual lawyers, but also for the future viability and sustainability of our noble profession.

This collection of student voices and perspectives is a critically important response to the need to promote law student and lawyer well-being. ALSA, and in particular Annabel Biscotto in her role as Equity and Wellbeing Officer for 2022, are to be commended for this volume which is part of ALSA's ongoing leadership in recognising the crucial nature of self-management and self-care – starting at law school. Over many years ALSA has acknowledged the reality of the challenges that law students and lawyers face, and of the importance of promoting mental well-being at law school and in the profession. Having worked in the area of lawyer and law student wellbeing for more than a decade, and being familiar with the significant body of extant literature, I am very impressed with the quality and depth of the contributions in this volume.

Mikaela cautions us to avoid romanticising the notion of hustle and to contextualise the success of others. She encourages us to prioritise time to recharge as a way of coping with the demands of legal study and work. Kara and Isabelle warn us about burn-out syndrome and highlight that we should consciously prioritise our own self-care and wellbeing. Giovanna challenges us to avoid obsessive expectations of success, suggesting that we can intentionally choose attitudes of gratitude, optimism and joy. Nikki reminds us of the value of routines and rituals, and gives us ideas for the development of good habits. Bradley and Sathyani focus on the importance of sleep, offering tips for sleeping well and helping us to understand the consequences of sleep deprivation. Jennifer and Emily highlight the importance of self-care in areas of legal practice that involve vicarious trauma, such as family law and criminal law, and of promoting trauma-informed approaches to managing the risks to mental health that arise in these contexts.

Leah recognises that although many law students feel as though they are the only person in the class who is not on top of things, we are actually not alone and things do get better, especially if we don't let go of things that support our well-being such as hobbies and exercise. Abigail recognises the importance of friends, connections and relatedness but notes that it is ok that not everyone will get along. Daylon recognises the challenges of transitioning to law school, acknowledging that in the context of cookie cutter moulds of privileged heterosexuality and the impact of societal and systemic forces, it is critically important to find and be our authentic selves. Sian offers a playful exploration of what contract law can teach us about self-care. Emma writes about the impact and risks of social media for psychological well-being, but also notes that social media can have positive benefits in connecting people and providing access to support and information. Judd shares his perspective on the power of saying no and of enforcing boundaries to prioritise where we allocate our energies. Finally, Annabel writes from the heart about a topic that so many law students and lawyers can relate to – perfectionism – and discusses some of the complex challenges it can create for those who live with it.

There are many positive lessons and timely warnings in these contributions, and I commend them to law students and legal professionals alike. The bottom-line is that it is critical for law students and lawyers as individuals, and for the legal academy and the legal profession collectively, to prioritise the promotion of psychological health and well-being.



President's Welcome

Alana Bonenfant
2021/2022 President

Welcome to the 2022 Mental Health and Wellbeing Publication. As President, I had goals for our term. On the top of the list, I wanted to expand our advocacy initiatives to reflect the diversity of the students we represent at a National level. Our diversity is our greatest strength. Importantly, I wanted our advocacy to be intersectional and inclusive.

If the past two years have taught us anything, it is that the 'status quo' is a thing of the past. The COVID-19 Pandemic has forced traditional work models to become flexible. As we navigate our studies and ultimately, our graduate positions, in this new world of blended workplaces, it is important that the next generation of legal professionals remains steadfast in our passion for what matters to us. Namely, inclusion, equity, and well-being. In the following pages, you may see yourself in someone else's experiences. What is most important to remember is that you are not alone. We are stronger together. While ALSA may be slightly removed from your day-to-day university experience, we are here for you.

This publication has been a few years in the making and its creation pre-dates the pandemic. If anything, this shows that mental health and wellbeing is more important than ever. It has been a labour of love across multiple ALSA terms and I am so proud to see it in print. A special thank you goes to Annabel Biscotto for her dedication to seeing this project come to fruition, and to Theodore Totsis, for working so closely with me to expand ALSA's Advocacy portfolios throughout the 2021-2022 term. Thank you to Nicholas Tsekouras and Gideon Daley for their work on earlier drafts. Take care of yourself, check in on each other and enjoy.

Editor's Note



Annabel Biscotto

2021/2022 Equity and Wellbeing Officer

I sincerely thank you for taking the time to read the ALSA 2022 Mental Health and Wellbeing Publication and warmly welcome you to the inaugural volume. It is a culmination of student articles which speak to the prevalent and important issue of mental health in our contemporary society, and a testament to the wide range of law students and their lived experiences. In the online age, we are slowly starting to break down the stigma surrounding the topic of mental health. But, there is still an enormous amount of work to be done. This publication seeks to encourage that purpose, and serve as an academic body of literature which will educate, inform and inspire the current legal landscape, and for many students to come.

The future of law must prioritise the wellbeing of those in its profession, and this publication reflects this expectation. This concern is one that overlaps with other issues, such as bullying and harassment, diversity and inclusion. These issues are pertinent to acknowledge at an educational level to foster a career where one does not have to second guess reaching out for support. The exploration of mental health and wellbeing is pertinent in our profession as there is often the expectation that we will experience higher levels of stress and burnout, and unfortunately, quite often this is the case. The release of this publication will promote discussions surrounding mental health which we hope will foster further reflections and actions in our broader community.

Thank you to past ALSA committee members in laying the groundwork and to the current committee for their ongoing support in seeing the Publication come to fruition. It is my honour to share these articles with you - written with love and compassion by a range of incredibly talented law students. After reading this Publication, I guarantee you will be left feeling refreshed, inspired, educated, and most importantly, not alone.

FEATURED AUTHORS

KARA BANKS
JUDD BEHR
ANNABEL BISCOTTO
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BRADLEY CAGUAN
ABIGAIL GREGORIO
EMILY GRUNDY-HYAM
DAYLON JOHNSTON
SATHYANI KOTAKADENIYA
NIKKI LYTTLE
ISABELLE LO
JENNIFER LONG
MIKAELA MARIANO
EMMA MORHALL
LEAH NIGLI
SIAN O'SULLIVAN

ROMANTICISING HUSTLE CULTURE IN LAW SCHOOL

The idea of constantly working is often romanticised. Law student or not, there's a common conception that conforming to a lifestyle of 'hustling' and 'getting on that grind', is what makes us an identifier, distinguishing ourselves from others. Yet, what I've noticed in my three years in law school, is that hustle culture is not one of inspiration. Rather, used as competition...at the expense of our mental health.

A consistent trend that I see in law school is the competition that comes with constantly working. In a sea of law students focused on "working towards the future", grinding at the expense of our mental well-being is overwhelming. A culture of self-sacrifice, where students learn to be guilt-ridden when they are not consumed with work, has done nothing but increase anxiety and lower self-esteem. Though 'hustle culture' promotes completing as many tasks as possible, it blurs the line between productivity and over-working.

In my first ever law lecture, the unit convenor said "the legal industry is oversaturated with high achieving students like yourselves...how would you make yourself stand out?". At the time, I did not think much of it. Until a couple of months ago, I scrolled through my LinkedIn home page, seeing posts of students like myself, who have been successful in their professional endeavours, and getting top grades whilst balancing several extra-curricular activities. I then thought back to what my lecturer said, thinking to myself:

"If I can't be on their level with their experience...If I can't do as many things as they're doing...then I'm an idiot...I'm a failure and I won't ever be successful"

Acknowledging these posts motivated me...but for the wrong reasons. Ambitious to be "on their level", I began to join more clubs than I could handle, joined more volunteer organisations, and studied more than I usually did in the hopes of being 'that' student.

But the stress it caused, and the way I isolated myself from spending time with my friends and family mentally crippled me. I was at my breaking point. I felt burnt out and lost energy for the things that I did enjoy. I felt guilty if I didn't use every second of my time to work toward my goals. I believed I didn't have room for complacency in my achievements because I could always work even harder, beyond my limits.

I felt like there was no one to talk to about it. Strangled in my thoughts of self-doubt and the constant need to maximise my time working, I kept thinking to myself:

"I have no right to complain when there are students like me who are balancing the same, if not MORE than I am and getting better grades than I am"

Of course, seeing all these students and their successes in university motivated me to work harder, but the problem was that working harder and harder seemed to have no end.

Ironically, the focus on trying to be as productive as possible and balancing all these activities whilst doing university studies full time, made me lose focus on what success is. It came to my senses that conforming to hustle culture encourages toxic productivity, in which one (unfortunately...) learns to associate it with their value as a person.

Of course, it's important to work hard towards the future based on your aspirations, but not to the extent where we sacrifice our leisure and family time to become successful people. It's so tempting to fall into this trap of constantly working and neglecting our social and mental needs. Hustle culture chews away from the importance of being able to recharge. Working with no limits and with no balance, to pursue one's own definition of success, is an exhausting and unsustainable way of living.

In order for us to perform at our best, we need to not only recharge ourselves but also encourage open discussion to break the stigma of this 'shame and embarrassment' of talking about our mental health. When I was at my breaking point, I decided to message one of my friends, and just opened up to her about taking on these extra responsibilities and how I felt like I needed to work all the time to do better. She messaged me the following:



“You need to be kind to yourself. Put yourself first and rest, for however long you need to fully recharge. You can’t expect yourself to work all the time without burning out. Your efforts are enough and if you want to be ready to your best foot forward, work-focused, you need to let yourself rest”

Her message assured me that it’s okay to not work all the time and the reality is, everyone needs to give themselves time to slow down and just take it easy to prevent burnout.

So to those of you who are pushing yourself more because of these crazy expectations and internal pressure to do more, your efforts are enough. Take some time off for yourself and let yourself recharge. Talk to a trusted friend and just spill everything. Take a day off to forget about work. Trust me, you will do better when you give yourself the rest that you need. And finally, let yourself be happy with what you achieved. You are enough and you will always be.

Mikaela Mariano

**THIRD YEAR LAW/ARTS STUDENT
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY**



THE BURDEN OF BURNOUT

A bird screams outside, waking me up as the clock blinks 5:47 am. I start to panic as the 5:00 pm deadline looms, and my progress after several all-nighters is only a measly introduction. Staring blankly at the computer, I sit in overworn PJs, feeling gross, greasy and too anxious to eat or socialise. Opening another red bull hoping it'll vanquish my sleep deficit of months, I wonder, 'Is it only me?'

Well, it isn't. Many, if not all, are symptoms of burnout. According to the WHO, burnout is a syndrome 'conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed'.^[1] WHO also characterises burnout by three dimensions: (1) 'feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion'; (2) 'increased mental distance from one's job'; (3) reduced professional efficacy'.^[2] Unsurprisingly, it is unnervingly common among students and professionals in the legal field.

Burnout among Law Students

We conducted a survey about burnout in law school among ANU students, and the response we received was sadly consistent. Almost every response said they were affected by burnout and detailed similar themes of sleep deprivation and exhaustion, increased anxiety, low motivation and procrastination. The spectrum of burnout symptoms described ranged from being 'perpetually stressed and tired' to 'depression and anxiety', revealing the troubling effects of burnout.

Although burnout isn't recognised as a medical diagnosis, it is on the 'spectrum' of mental health disorders and can create or exacerbate symptoms of other mood and anxiety disorders.^[3] One student stated that '[Their] anxiety was entirely linked to law school', whilst another described having 'panic attacks' when burnt out. Students also listed physical effects of burnout, including 'lack of appetite', 'trouble sleeping', 'poor concentration' and 'getting sick'. Recent research has found 'vital exhaustion' increases cardiovascular disease risk and likelihood of type II diabetes, male infertility, sleep disorders and musculoskeletal disorders.^[4]

The Role of Law School

We asked the students how much of a role studying law contributed to their burnout. A common sentiment showed law was a major contributor, more so than other subjects. This is attributed to high workloads 'that never really ends.' Students felt like they were 'constantly trying to catch up' and spending lots of time but 'feel[ing] like [they have] never done enough'. One student suggested that the 'largely self-driven' and 'flipped classroom' model at ANU was placing more pressure on students as they were more responsible for their degree and progression in courses.

Perfectionism is an ingrained part of law school leading to burnout for many. Interestingly, a psychologist posited that perfectionists may 'self-select into occupations such as the law'.^[5] Studies have suggested that due to the legal profession's nature with 'socially accepted stereotypes of competence', more lawyers suffer from imposter syndrome.^[6] Many students were constantly comparing themselves to others when 'no one else around you seems to be struggling,' causing feelings of inadequacy, impacting motivation, and raising stress levels.

The competitiveness of law school was a common theme. One student suggested that there was 'more pressure to prove how successful and involved you are both in and beyond your studies,' leading to overcommitment. As a high-achieving high school student, I have had difficulties in stopping myself from overcommitting to prove that I was a well-rounded and successful individual amongst everyone doing the same. I imagine that many students find it hard to distance themselves from this mindset as the seemingly imminent pressure to start your career leads to overcommitment and a reduction in time for activities you enjoy.

Unfortunately, there is no significant change entering the workforce. One student alluded to a sense of hopelessness as 'if you're already struggling at University maybe you're not ready for the real world.' 'The Burnout Profession' suggested that young professionals were part of the 'burnout generation' due to dramatic workplace changes and were becoming financially worse off than their parents' generation.^[7] One important difference is the need young professionals feel to be constantly available in answering calls and emails long after work hours, insofar as communication has become easier.^[8] One lawyer remarked: 'it's difficult to reconcile the way law is practised today – billable hours, tight deadlines, high client service levels – with good mental health.'^[9] Although pessimistic, this realistic view shows how the current law profession pushes young professionals to get ahead, often sacrificing mental health.

Combating Burnout

We asked ANU law students how they combat burnout. Doing things you enjoy — exercising, hobbies, meaningful self-care and socialising with those you care about — was raised frequently. One student commented: '[I] remind myself of why I'm doing this [and] all the work I put in to get here' and how 'talking about the interesting parts' of courses helps. Students also stressed the importance of getting help. This is easier said than done particularly as many students feel their situation is 'not bad enough' to warrant help but everyone deserves to be supported. Many suggested dropping a course and getting extensions or educational access plans. They recommended seeking professional help for mental health is critical rather than toughing it out.

One student commented on 'a fundamental rethink on how we are teaching law.' The student also said 'it is also important to remind them that everyone studies law at their own pace and it may be counterproductive to compare yourselves to other[s].' While a work-life balance may seem to be the most obvious answer to burnout, it can be difficult to implement when too exhausted to do things you enjoy, especially when receiving 'subconscious messaging that university work is the most important aspect of your life'.^[10]

Conclusion

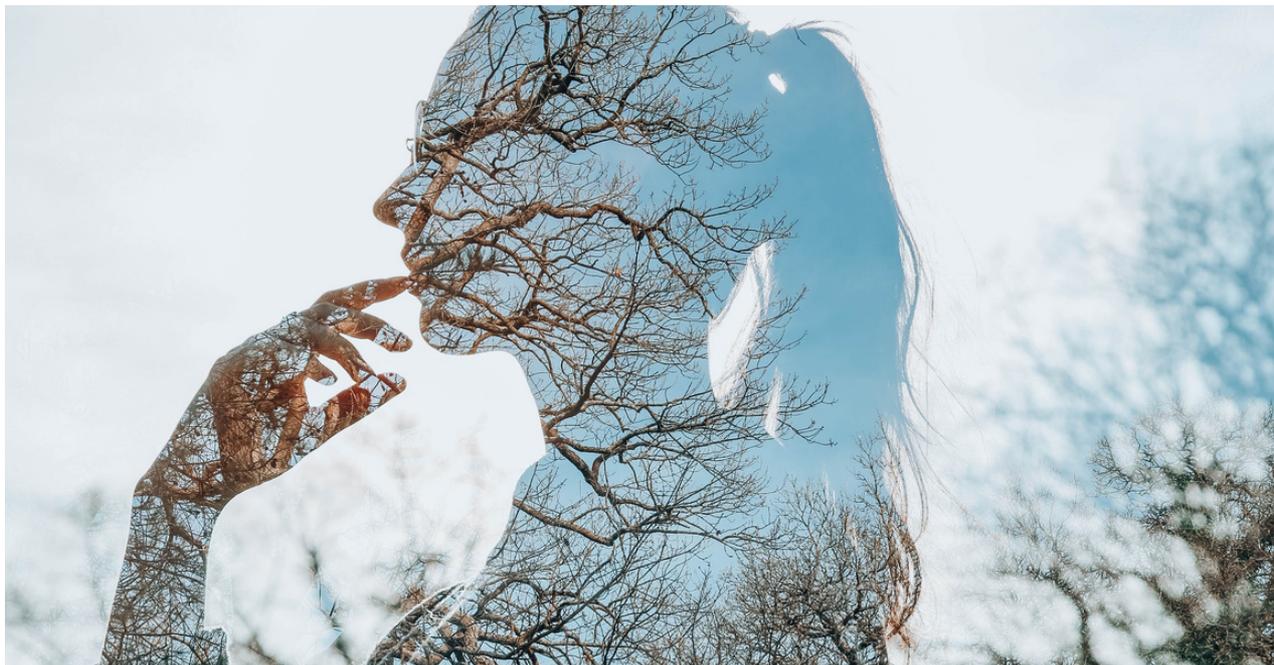
Being submerged in a culture of perfectionism, competitiveness, high expectations and stress, it is easy to resignedly accept that a law career inevitability warrants burnout. However, it is important to remember you are not alone: burnout affects the majority of law students and legal professionals, pointing to a larger issue within the industry. Whilst structural reform may seem far-away, perhaps it starts with us prioritising our mental health and drawing boundaries between work and personal life as the next generation of lawyers.

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IS YOUR SUCCESS MEASURED ON A CURVE?

It's not often that a television advertisement causes a person to reconsider their entire outlook on life. However, I recently experienced this unusual phenomenon whilst viewing an advertisement for Suzuki cars. The ad itself was neither exemplary nor unorthodox, however, I absolutely love it's opening line:

"Success is graded on a curve that's on your face."

Imagine a world where joy was the metric upon which we based our success; a world that viewed the relentless pursuit of money, status, power, position, and possessions as secondary to the aspiration for something arguably more valuable. Now imagine your world repositioned towards the pursuit of lifelong jubilation, unconditional love for others, and the kind of euphoria that makes your cheeks hurt from smiling too much. What is different in that presently fictitious world and why is it that this divergence manifests itself in your imagination rather than your reality?

It is unrealistic to think that you will always feel on top of the world, however, I believe that every person has the choice to wake up each day and consciously adopt an attitude of gratitude, optimism, and joy. Just like anything, this mindset takes patience and practice, but you are powerful and more than capable of cultivating the life that you wish to lead, regardless of what that looks like.

So if you're still with me by this point, I believe it important to ask yourself this question:

If happiness was your measure of success, how successful are you?

Irrespective of the answer, please recognise that you are not alone wherever you find yourself on the scale. The journey towards success, as rewarding as it may be, is not an easy one by any measure. I know, beyond all reasonable doubt, that I am not perfect and by this metric I am far from the most successful person on this planet. However, I like to believe that every day I'm becoming just a little bit more successful, as I hope you are too.

So, how does one procure this type of relentless joy I hear you ask? Well, I'm no expert on this topic, however, I do want to share some practices that have helped me along my journey towards success in the hope that they might assist you too:

Be a traitor to the hustle culture.

I am sure you've heard it said that people either 'live to work' or 'work to live', but I want to encourage you to do the latter. My hope for every person reading this is that you find true joy and fulfillment in your work, but that does not mean work has to consume everything that you are. We live in a world that preaches a 'hurry and hustle' ideology but in order to escape the ruthless cycle of burn out, you must learn to swim against the tide, take time for yourself, and know when it's time to clock out.

Invest into your relations (as well as the stock market)

Scientists have long foretold that human-beings are social creatures and recent government isolation mandates have certainly proved them right. Meaningful, intimate, and trusting relationships are a vital ingredient to holistic success. It's easy to take our relationships for granted when they have existed for years or seem circumstantially secure. But let me challenge you to fight that natural complacency. Instead, seek to explore your friendships on a deeper level by being more intuitive, asking the tough questions, practicing active listening, and allowing yourself to be vulnerable. I promise that you won't regret it.

Create some atomic habits.

One of the best things I ever did for my mental health was committing to a solid workout routine. At first it was something I did just to wake myself up in the morning, but now it's grown into a ritual that I protect at all costs due to the positive impact a daily dose of endorphins has on my life. I don't know what floats your boat – maybe its gratitude journaling, reading a self-help book, going on a social media-detox, cooking dinner for your family, or volunteering at a local charity – but whatever it is, find an activity that feeds your soul and create a habit out of doing it.



Build bountiful boundaries.

The noun 'boundary' is not a popular word, but I promise it's a beneficial one. Boundaries not only protect us from doing things we will later regret, they also prevent us from losing what's not worth giving up. Some of my personal favourite boundaries include a 10pm curfew and a 2hr daily screen time – these certainly aren't popular practices and are highly tempting to overstep, but I know the benefit of implementing them far outweighs the sacrifice.

Set endless goals (in both senses of the word).

Not only should you never stop setting goals for yourself, but you should also set goals that never end. I'm not talking about unachievable goals, rather, goals that are so achievable that you don't ever need to cease achieving them. For example, don't set the goal of running 10km, firstly because this is super overwhelming and secondly, because once you reach the end of that 10km track, the sense of fulfillment fades and you must set a new goal. Instead, set the goal of becoming a runner – this way whether you run 10m or 10km, you are successful and you can find success through that goal each and every day.

Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

There is a lot that can be said about the beauty of silence in a world that is polluted by sound. Living in a big city already means that we never really get a moment of peace and quiet. However, if we were ever blessed with the chance, I'm sure we'd be too preoccupied by the sound of a podcast or our ticktock to even notice. In today's culture, silence needs to be fought for, but it's worth the fight. So take a long bath, go on that nature walk, seek out a sabbatical, and just enjoy a moment to yourself - to listen, to breathe, and to bring peace back into your soul.

Never lose sight of your why.

What is the reason that you get out of bed every day? Deep down, I'm sure that it's not your alarm clock, but rather a passion to make a positive impact on the world around you through whatever it is that you do. Or perhaps it's a desire to help others, or a zeal for discovery and adventure, or maybe a deep love for the life that you lead. Now, I know that won't be true for every person reading this, but I promise that it can be. Once upon a time, you had a dream and I hope that you decided to chase it - but if not, it is never too late to try. If you haven't already, make it your mission today to find your why; the why behind what you do, who you chose to be, where you're going, and what you think success looks like. And once you've found it, don't lose sight of whatever that is to you because that truly is the secret to your success.

Regardless of what your measure of success is, everyone must walk a journey to reach it. So do not be disheartened, only encouraged that the path of life which lies ahead of you is one with many mountains that you'll reach the climax of, countless problems that you'll solve, and numerous battles in which you'll be victorious. Life won't always be easy, but I promise you this: it is nothing you can't handle.

Giovanna Bongiorno

**SECOND YEAR LAW/COMMERCE STUDENT
CURTIN UNIVERSITY**



INTRODUCING ROUTINES AND RITUALS

'You'll never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret to your success is found in your daily routine.' - John C. Maxwell

Daily habits change our future. What a person decides to repeatedly do, ends up defining who they become.[1] These decisions give us a sense of control and make us feel in charge of our life's trajectory.[2] However, routines and rituals should not only be considered in this grand scheme of success and control, but also the smaller every day; repeated activities creating routines and rituals can add meaning and joy to our lives by transforming mundane actions into significant ones.[3]

I What is a Habit, a Routine, and a Ritual?

Habits and routines are different.[4] Generally, a habit is created by an automatic urge to do something, being triggered by a subconscious cue.[5] A habit becomes more ingrained as the connection between the trigger and the habit becomes stronger.[6] A routine, on the other hand, requires conscious practice.[7] Without intentional repetition, the routine dies out.[8] A person needs to *want* a routine to become a habit for the process to happen.[9]

In contrast to a habit and a routine, a ritual is a determined series of actions that are regularly performed with meaningful intent.[10] Rituals allow you to put values into practice by embodying the actions and tasks that matter to you personally, in turn making you happier and boosting your wellbeing.[11]

II Why is Any of This Relevant to the Legal Profession?

Building meaningful habits and rituals have been found to create an abundance of benefits for everyone, not simply those within the legal industry. Rituals can increase a person's appreciation, transform the mundane, aid in celebrating life, and build a stronger community.[12] Establishing routines can 'harness the power of positivity', allowing us to organise our lives and settle our self-consciousness.[13] Introducing routines and rituals into your life can allow for a prioritisation of time and focus, eliminating the excess energy required for mental activities that may cause stress and anxiety.[14] This leaves more time to enjoy things that you are passionate about.[15] Setting up a natural routine allows for things to be accomplished with ease as they become a habit.[16] Rituals remove procrastination, reduce anxiety and boost motivation.[17] Actively nurturing your self-consciousness is said to help 'effortlessly steer your life towards greater things'.[18]

III How Can I Create a Routine?

The creation of a routine comes down to the development of an easy 3-step habit loop.[19]

1. Cue: Pick a starting action for the routine you want to turn into a habit.
2. Routine: Complete the routine.
3. Reward: Follow it up with something you enjoy! Subconsciously train your body into remembering this habit loop for the future, creating a positive association.[20]

The most difficult part is making sure to complete the routine after the cue; this requires conscious effort which will eventually turn into a subconscious habit.[21] Habit stacking may be a great way to help develop the new routine. Adding a small habit to an existing one can make it easier to establish a habit loop as it only requires a little deviation from an already established part of your life.[22]

IV How Can I Develop this Routine into a Ritual?

The intention behind an action is the main difference between a routine and a ritual. Routines are often seen as necessary tasks, whereas rituals are deemed meaningful with a different sense of purpose.[23] Rituals don't need to be spiritual or religious; the key element to a ritual is every person's subjective experience. A ritual requires a fully engaged focus on the experience of the task, instead of simply its completion.[24] Each ritual needs to have a definitive beginning, middle, and end.[25] For example, making a cup of tea at the same time every day and enjoying it may turn into a ritual when you mindfully appreciate the moment.[26] Such rituals may become sacred to each individual as they carry meaning.[27]

V What Routines and Rituals Can I Adopt?

Often, creating rituals that are related to family or pets is a great place to start due to existing connections.[28] Simply

calling someone at the same time every week for a chat can start to develop personal benefits, such as the consolidation of meaningful connections. Consciously enjoying the moment allows you to be present and have meaningful experiences.[29]

Many routines and rituals can be easily adopted:

- Keeping a journal,
- Morning stretches,
- Drinking a cup of tea and reading a book before bed,
- Regular walks with friends,
- Meditation,
- Repeating affirmations,
- A mindful tea or coffee in the morning,
- Scheduling a rest day,
- Recreational reading,
- Morning exercise.[30]

However, new routines do not need to be established for rituals to be created. Adding mindfulness to current routines is perfect for creating rituals. For example, mindfully enjoying a shower, the meal you have cooked, or even cleaning can allow for deeper connections to be formed between your body and mind, becoming more satisfied and aware.[31]

Adding mindfulness to create everyday rituals ensures you don't end up living life on autopilot.[32] Allow yourself to add a little bit of meaning and joy to your busy, and often stressful, legal life by transforming mundane actions into significant ones.[33] As suggested by John C. Maxwell, set yourself up for success through your daily routine; a little change could change your life for the better.

Why not give it a go?

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DOING MORE BY DOING LESS: THE CASE FOR REPRIORITISING OUR SLEEP

"I didn't sleep last night!" exclaims your friend, struggling to prepare for tomorrow's exam. "Sleep is for the weekend", she proclaims as she chugs her sixth caffeine fix for the morning. Another corrects her: "Sleep is for the weak."

In the last century, this attitude has dominated schools and workplaces. For something considered a golden pillar of health, something we'll spend a third of our lives doing, sleep is usually the first to be sacrificed in pursuit of a seemingly scarce resource: time. As such, many law students feel that sleep deprivation isn't a problem but an asset that'll carry them through their professional life. While some may see such bad habits as a badge of honour, sleep deprivation is physically, mentally and emotionally debilitating.

The self-deprecating law student reading this will probably laugh, so, rather than plead for you to care for yourself, I'll explain how sleep can help in service to the work you do. For the amazing cost of zero dollars and zero work, you can do more by doing much less!

In promoting the old rule of "sleep early and sleep 7-8 hours," I'll first explain the benefits of the two main stages of sleep: Non-Rapid Eye Movement sleep (NREM) and Rapid Eye Movement sleep (REM). Each stage alternates throughout the duration of your slumber so it's equally important to spend the appropriate amount of time in each stage. Without the appropriate amount of NREM and REM sleep, you can't reap the wonderful benefits of sleep.

Sleep's Benefits

There's evidence that NREM sleep contributes to memory and focus. Consider the brain as a library. During NREM sleep, the brain pushes a library cart filled with all the information you learned during the day. In 7-8 hours, the brain stores all that information into your long-term memory, clears the cart and gets it ready for the next day. Keeping that cart clear is important for your focus.

What if you only got 6 hours? For most adults, the brain can't empty the cart in time so not only does yesterday's information not get filed, but the already cluttered cart gets stacked with even more information. It's no wonder sleep deprivation makes it harder to focus; the brain is overloaded. Remember those cases you memorised through sleepless nights of last-minute cramming? Consider reading them over once or twice then let sleep take the wheel. Sleep researcher Matthew Walker puts it eloquently: "Practice does not make perfect. It is practice, followed by a night of sleep, that leads to perfection."

If NREM sleep is the brain filing information for the long-term, then REM sleep is the brain connecting the dots. Have you ever felt like you couldn't understand something, went to sleep and woke up feeling like a genius? Be sure to thank your sleeping brain. In an exam, 7-8 hours of sleep can be the difference between seeing what rule applies to a set of facts and being blind. When it comes to higher-order thinking, sleep is non-negotiable. More importantly, REM sleep helps manage and process emotions. It's no secret that law school breeds anxiety and while I'm not saying sleep is a cure for stress, sleep deprivation will certainly compound stress and anxiety into something significantly worse.

Our understanding of REM sleep affirms the importance of a daily 7-8 hours of sleep. Frighteningly, sleeping 6 hours or less can eliminate 90% of your nightly REM sleep (as the bulk occurs in the last two hours of an 8-hour slumber). This means you're losing both the benefits of the unconscious brain's free labour and the routine regulation of turbulent emotion. If we wish to take care of our mental health, sleep must be at the forefront of our self-care.

The Vicious Cycle of Sleep Deprivation

The consequences of sleep deprivation aren't well understood among the general public. In the absence of such information, we convince ourselves that chronic sleep deprivation isn't cured by long-term sleeping habits but by cups of coffee. Unfortunately, caffeine can't replace sleep. While it'll keep you awake for a bit, the restorative benefits of sleep aren't reaped and from what I've listed, sleep is super important for your focus, memory, efficiency and mental health. Law school is notorious for its colossal workload and the hyper-competitive culture of hustling pushes students to juggle chainsaws on a unicycle. We're Kafka's Poseidon: the God of the Sea swamped in paperwork.



How many of us find ourselves trapped in the vicious cycle of staying up late, losing sleep, feeling tired the next day and doing the whole thing all over again? When the papers pile high, we become restless rats racing on the wheel. But rats can't run forever. No one can. Stop. Rest. You may feel like depriving yourself of sleep is the only option to get more done but it only forces you to work harder than usual as you become less focused, less efficient, more forgetful and more stressed. The sobering reality of chronic sleep deprivation is that eventually, functioning on fumes becomes the new normal; we forget what it's like to operate on 7-8 hours of sleep.

Australians are sleeping less and less as our culture of constant grinding robs us of a basic human need. Sleep's no longer a need but a luxury. In our pursuit of career mobility, tired eyes become war scars. Tired eyes are becoming the new normal with the younger generations. Imagine those same sets of eyes 20 years from now...

This attitude toward sleep has gotten so bad. How bad? It's gotten so bad that we flex sleeplessness. It's gotten so bad that I have to appeal to the 'productivity benefits' of sleep to convince my peers to reprioritise a basic human need.

It's time we consider putting the books away at night. It's time we build back healthy sleeping habits for 7-8 hours. It's time we take back the benefits that evolution has perfected over millions of years.

It's time we do more by doing less.

Bradley Cagauan

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A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO CLIENT INTERACTIONS

Perhaps law students would not expect to need to know about trauma for their future practice. However, lawyers who work in criminal law, family law, domestic violence, child abuse, immigration and refugee law, and personal injury are more than likely to encounter clients who have experienced trauma. Being aware of the impact of trauma and taking a trauma-informed approach will assist a trauma-affected client to feel safe, encourage engagement, and in turn provide a more positive experience.

The Impact of Trauma

Trauma can arise from one-off or repeated adverse events, whether perceived or actually experienced, that can put people into a state of high arousal and can threaten to overwhelm their ability to cope.[1] Complex trauma is experienced when events are repeated and extreme, occur over a long time, or are perpetrated in childhood by caregivers.[2] Traumatic events can activate the 'fight', flight', or 'freeze' responses in the brain as a protective mechanism, which can have an ongoing impact on the person unless the underlying trauma is resolved.[3] These responses become a physical reality in the brain,[4] and can 're-fire' when the person is faced with situations that remind them of these traumatic events.

Possible trauma responses and how they may outwork when interacting with a client include:[5]

- A loss of trust in others can affect communication, engagement, and the ability to progress a matter.
- Sensitivity to trauma triggers leads to a reluctance to disclose facts, or a heightened emotional response when disclosing facts.
- Difficulty interpreting and regulating emotion where annoyance can become rage, and disappointment can become despair quite quickly, which can affect the client's ability to remain focused on the issues at hand.
- Difficulty using language to talk about or describe trauma may hinder your ability in an initial appointment to gather all the facts of the client's situation.
- Difficulties with attention, learning and memory may mean the client is difficult to engage, or they are unable to recall key details.
- Increased attention and sensitivity to cues indicating a threat; for example, where the client might over-react with extreme fearfulness to any sign of your frustration.
- Difficulty with 'sensory integration' which may lead to increased anxiety if the environment is noisy or there is too much complex information provided. The client may disengage or become anxious, or even abruptly leave an appointment.
- Greater awareness and notice taken of non-verbal 'negative' information like body language and facial expressions, so the client will notice not only what you are saying, but how you are saying it.

A Trauma-Informed Approach

A simple understanding of the impacts of stress and trauma on the body and brain, and strategies to avoid exacerbating the issues that may arise with the client affected by trauma, will help implement a trauma-informed approach.[6] Consistent emphasis on what may have happened to the client rather than what is 'wrong' with the client will help the lawyer engage with empathy.[7]

There are five core principles upon which trauma informed practice is founded:[8]

1. safety – ensure physical and emotional safety.
2. trust – maximise trust through task clarity, consistency and interpersonal boundaries.
3. choice – maximise client's choice and control.
4. collaboration – maximise collaboration and sharing of power.
5. empowerment – prioritise empowerment and skill-building.

Clients who have experienced complex trauma often have a tenuous, to the point of non-existent, sense of safety.[9] A lawyer can build emotional safety into every interaction with the client by being affirming and empathetic and adapting their interview and communication style.[10] It is common for a trauma affected client to present as withdrawn or emotionally flat, and by acknowledging how difficult it is to share the information you can provide them with a greater sense of control.[11] The client who becomes angry or suspicious can be helped by you validating their frustration while not getting defensive.[12]

A Trauma-Informed Approach in An Initial Interview with a Client

Safety

Kirsty arrives for her first appointment at your family law practice. She has recently separated from her husband and is seeking legal advice regarding a property settlement and custody of her children. She arrives late, flustered, and extremely nervous.

Greet Kirsty warmly, even though you may be irritated that she has arrived late. Give her the choice of where she would like to sit in the interview room and ask her if she would like the door left open. These small gestures help the client have a sense of safety and control. Build rapport by talking about something other than the reason for her appointment. Find a uniting interest,[13] even if it is simply about the weather.

Trust and Collaboration

Provide Kirsty with some guidelines for the meeting, establishing that you are there to help her solve her legal problem by hearing her story, and answering any questions she may have. State that you will follow up the meeting with a letter of advice and ask her preferred method of contact.

Any attempt to build trust will enhance communication and engagement. By providing structure to the meeting, you are establishing clarity. Following up the meeting as promised in a timely manner will continue to build trust.

Choice and Empowerment

As Kirsty begins to recount the details of the separation, she becomes agitated, disclosing that her husband is abusive and has also assaulted the children at various times. She can't remember details and begins to cry and cannot go on with the interview.

A trauma informed approach will recognise that Kirsty has been triggered by having to explain her situation. Identifying and empathising with the client will help the client settle again, feel safe that their feelings are acknowledged, and empower them to choose to continue when they are ready. It is important to let the story be told and be told in full.[14] It is also important to remember that a lawyer is not a therapist but a legal advocate to help the client solve a problem.[15]

While this initial interview example applies basic principles of a trauma-informed approach, even making slight adjustments to the way a client is interviewed for the first time can enhance the lawyer-client relationship.

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THE DIARY OF A FIRST YEAR LAW STUDENT

Nothing in high school fully prepared me for the university experience. Unfortunately, politics and law were not available subjects at the time, and my only insight into the study of law was the minimal civics that I did from Years 7 to 10. My only real exposure to law was my obsession with the movie *Legally Blonde*, and even so, the movie definitely catfished me in regards to how easy law was.

I'm loving the experience thus far, and law is incredibly interesting. However, it has been quite stressful. The copious amounts of reading, and the myriad of legal jargon that has been thrown my way has left me feeling a bit lost and confused — not to mention the seemingly infinite number of legal databases I have to learn to navigate. Trying to understand it all while getting through the readings for the week has felt like an impossible task. Although it feels like everyone except me is on top of their studies, it has been refreshing to talk with my fellow first year law students, as I've found that most — if not all of them — were experiencing the same thing as me. The main assumption that many of us had made was that everyone knew what they were doing — and that everyone had it together from day one.

I also attended a first year crash course for law, and hearing the experience of the older law students genuinely put me at ease. One of them said that their first few law units were a disaster, but it genuinely got better as they went on, and I couldn't help but feel very validated. Once I realised that I was not alone, it was definitely a turning point for me in my state of mind.

Since then, my friends and I who do law have made a further attempt to balance our workload and to seek help where needed, for I think it's so important that students in need of help actually ask for it because this is such an overlooked part of the studying process. One day at a group study session for my law units really enlightened me to the help outlets available — and networking with some of the older law students has been unbelievably valuable, as they have been such a great source of advice and support.

If I could go back six weeks and do it all again, there are some definite changes that I'd make from the get-go just to make the transition into law more...digestible.

The moment university started, I dropped all my hobbies and pastimes to finish the infinite number of readings, which was my number one cardinal mistake. The law is something you need to abide by every day, but studying law shouldn't be a 24/7 activity. Taking the time to disconnect from university work and reading every now and again have helped me engage better with my studies.

Getting on campus has also helped me to retain some mental stability. While rolling out of bed and attending lectures from home is great, human interaction and having the tactile experience of being in a study environment can actually be very refreshing. Due to all the walking around campus, going to university is also a great way of getting some physical activity, which leads me to my next point.

By no means am I a sporty person. However, when I'm sitting in front of a computer or with my head in a book for most of the day, it becomes increasingly important to have that physical activity and get outside a little. I think that it's important for all students, regardless of athletic ability, to have some form of exercise. The countless clubs available at uni and in the community are all great opportunities to not only get involved with others but also keep yourself happy and healthy.

The adjustment process into law is nowhere near over, and it might not be easy. Nonetheless, it's beyond vital that students are easy on themselves — because comparing yourself to others is the worst thing you can do for your own mental wellbeing. Ask for help where needed and make sure to establish some kind of study-life balance!

Leah Nigli

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HOW
ARE
YOU,
REALLY?

OVERALL MURALS
SINCE 1990

FRIENDS

The world as a whole has been going through it, and if there is one thing that has helped me out it has been my friends. I come to you with 3 pieces of advice that have been constructed through experience and therapy. In my tumultuous journey of 'finding myself', I have had to learn some fundamental steps that I often thought other people inherently knew – apparently not. So, just in case you have not heard these tips before or maybe you are not sure if you believe them, here they are – coming from someone who spent 2 decades running away from connections.

Tip 1: You need friends.

Despite what girl bosses and lone wolves may tell you, you cannot do this alone. Law school, mental health, and navigating 2022 requires connections, compassion, and care. Having people that you can rely on does not make you weak. Having nobody to talk to because you have convinced yourself that you don't need anybody else does not make you strong. Humans thrive off of contact with each other: whether it be in small amounts for the introverts, or large amounts for the extroverts. I moved to Perth by myself and, for the first year, I refused to accept help from anyone because I was convinced that I would only ever need me. This was not true. I was not 'thriving' or 'living my best life' - I was emotionally numb and consistently burnt out because I insisted on doing everything myself. Sometimes, it is easy to forget how helpful it can be when someone offers to help you move furniture into your first-floor apartment.

Tip 2: Nobody is the 'ultimate' friend.

On the other end of the friendship scale is the idea that people can be the ultimate friend - capable of fulfilling all needs at all times. Again, this is wrong. This idea took a lot of therapy to fully understand but it is a life-changing sentiment. A few categories of friendship types are:

- Advice: People who help you navigate difficult areas of life with their wisdom and support.
- Fun: These are the people that you spend your free time with when you want to feel more freedom or enjoyment.
- Comfort: These are people that you can enjoy sitting in silence with. Being on your phone in the same room as them is better than being alone, even if nothing is happening.

This list is not exhaustive, and it is important to remember that some friends will span across multiple categories, and some won't. That is okay. Furthermore, remember that you will also fit into different categories for different people. Not every friend will feel comfortable disclosing their deepest secrets with you, but that does not mean you are not as important or valuable as the friend who does hear these secrets. We have different friends for different reasons – that is the beauty of friendship.

Also, it is 2022 and we are no longer accepting co-dependent toxicity. This applies to any kind of relationship. Social media tends to romanticise these kinds of relationships – it shouldn't. This assumes that one person will be able to fulfil all of your needs, or that you will be able to fulfil somebody else's. This is dangerous to both parties as one person will constantly be drained and the other will constantly feel like they are not getting enough. Both people deserve a friendship that respects each other's boundaries and provides an amount of support that is healthy to both the giver, and the receiver.

Tip 3: Not everyone will get along.

People-pleasers, I see you. Mainly because I see myself. It is really easy to forgive or forget bad behaviour as a means of keeping the people in your life happy, but you need to remember that you also deserve happiness. There are billions of people on this Earth with a myriad of experiences and perspectives. Sometimes, people are going to clash with you. That is okay. Neither person is inherently bad for having differing views. If you find someone that you cannot find common ground with, it is okay to walk away. In fact, it is beneficial to both of you to move on. In the same way that you don't have to hate every person who isn't your friend, you do not have to love every person who isn't your enemy. Allow yourself to remain as acquaintances or colleagues. If an interaction with someone leaves you feeling drained, used, or unwanted then don't continue to spend time with them. They will find their people, and you will find yours.

...continued on the next page



In conclusion, you can be a boss-girl entrepreneur and still cry in front of your friends. You can be a wise person who has friends that you only have banter with. You can be a kind and genuine person who is not friends with everyone. Friendships are integral for a world filled with confusion and hate. Law school is no different. Find people who help you when you feel down, and then help them up when they stumble. Surround yourself with people who amaze you, support you, and care for you. Respect others, and learn to be okay with loving yourself. I promise that in finding your people, you will also learn to find yourself.

Abigail Gregorio

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UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

University has been a whirlwind from Day 1, and I don't think students are given enough credit for the major changes in their lives they are about to undertake in the pursuit of traditional means of success. I know for me, my family was always supportive of my endeavours, but the thought of me not going to university, or going to a university with less prestige behind it was out of the question. Success was demanded from me because I was academically better than they were. It's sweet to think about in one sense, but in another, I find it really uncomfortable to think about. I didn't grow up in the city or with money behind me. Unlike many others who while growing up were both navigating their sense of self and going through the trials and tribulations of one's teen years, I was having to put that aside to help support my family financially — and dealing with many at home problems. Although as unsavoury as my upbringing was, I do attribute it to my desire to study and practice law – to help others who can't help themselves, particularly in the space of Child Protection and Family Law.

Because of my circumstances, I never gave myself the time to consider my sexuality. It was hard enough going to a pretty close-minded school and having an extremely limited understanding of what sexuality meant generally and to me. However, now I am having to do it in an environment where so many people seem to just know themselves, are at the top of their game, or honestly, were born into the privilege of doing well. The experience wasn't terrifying but definitely overwhelming. I grew up thinking that sexuality was not fluid, that there was no spectrum and to consider anything was insane. Yes, the LGBTQIA+ Community existed, but something about it seemed tokenistic. It was a hot topic in the political sphere — and rightfully so — but so many were using it as a means for gain. In the university context I was seeing with my own eye's the GBF trope, the glamorising and tokenism of queer people (particularly Gay men) by the heterosexual community. I found this extremely confronting as while I was coming to understand myself, I found others simply ignoring the struggle or experiences of individuals, characterising them by the stereotypes they wanted to see in real life and forcing their friends into boxes within their own identity. I was a victim to this. People I considered friends would do this to me. Through this stereotyping, I further battled with my own sense of identity in a field that is dominated by a cookie-cutter mould of privileged heterosexuality. Conform and be liked, don't conform and be me.

These aren't the personal battles you should be facing in these years of your life. But these are the battles society has imposed. It gets even more difficult for other individuals again. At the end of the day, I am now in my fifth year of study. After a bit of trial and error, participating in programs I am truly passionate about and defying the mold, I have been able to confidently walk as my own unique self. If there is one thing to take away from my little story, I would say don't let society, university or the field change you into someone you are not. Regardless of your background you have fought for your place. You did. Not some idea of you or stereotype of the people you may represent. It's an uphill battle but one that is so much easier, or at least bearable (thanks equity) if you do it as uniquely and wholly as you.

Daylon Johnston

THIRD YEAR LAW STUDENT
QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY



WHAT CONTRACT LAW CAN TEACH YOU ABOUT SELF-CARE

Law school is full on and for many people when there are many things on the “to do list” self-care can fall to the wayside. Self-care is not just about facemasks and lighting a candle. It can include everything from showering and eating well to catching up with friends and regularly exercising. Self-care includes all the things you need to be healthy and feel your best. It is incredibly important because it creates the foundation you need to be able to tackle things like work and law school. Creating a solid foundation is also important in contract law, which is why the formation of a contract can be the perfect metaphor for creating a good self-care routine.

I Offer and Acceptance

You may not know this, but your body is constantly submitting offers to your brain. For example, your digestive system might offer to give you some more energy if your brain gets you to consume something other than iced coffee. It pays to listen to what and when your body and mind tell you they need.

II Consideration

The basic premise of consideration is that it must be sufficient, but need not be adequate. The same goes for self-care. Life's big problems often don't have a quick, easy solution and sometimes even small tasks can seem impossible to deal with. When you are struggling, something is better than nothing. When your skincare routine seems overwhelming, just brushing your teeth is enough. When your assignment is completely daunting, just making some notes is enough. A lot of the time just doing something small will make you feel a lot better.

III Intention to be legally bound

In contractual disputes, intention is an essential element. It's also important to consider intention if you feel a bit guilty or stressed about taking time for self-care. When we're faced with a million important things to do, it is helpful to consider the intention behind self-care tasks that we often overlook. For example, your intention behind going for a walk is probably more about de-stressing than procrastinating your readings, so there is no need to feel bad about that. This takes time and practice but can be a really valuable self-care tool in the long run.

IV Certainty and Completeness

Just like you would in an exam question, it is helpful to reflect on any uncertainty you feel when it comes to your health and wellbeing. If you feel like you are taking good enough care of yourself, but you still feel really exhausted all the time, you might benefit from speaking to a healthcare professional. We can get caught up in our own perspectives and make self-assurances that we're fine, but just like in contract law we need to assess from an objective, reasonable perspective. Speaking to a doctor or a therapist might be daunting, but sometimes the best self-care can involve seeking help from independent third parties.

Sian O'Sullivan

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Social media refers broadly to web and mobile platforms that allow individuals to be able to connect with others within a virtual network. On these platforms, members can share and exchange digital content including messages, videos, and pictures.[1] Since its inception in 2010, Instagram has been a widely popular photo and video sharing platform. However, in recent years, as the world has pivoted towards mental health advocacy and greater understanding of mental health and what that means, platforms such as Instagram have come under scrutiny as to their impacts.

Studies have reported that individuals living with mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, or other severe mental illnesses, use social media at comparable rates as the general population; by example, the rate in young individuals is upwards of 97%.[2] Some studies have shown that individuals with mental illness who use social media platforms actually use it to share their lived experiences and seek information and support from others in similar circumstances.[3] Treatment for those living with mental illness can be hard to come by and the wide reach of social media may be able to afford to those suffering an opportunity to address the shortfalls in mental health care by enhancing the availability and reach of services, with the interactive nature of social media being able to enhance the delivery of interventions.

In September 2021, a whistle-blower from within Facebook suggested that Instagram use has negatively impacted teenage girls' body image. This seemed to have shocked the general public. However, there have been numerous studies done prior to this that have long given a clear understanding of its negative impact. Jennifer Mills, a professor of Psychology at York University, spoke out on this topic after conducting her own research and said, "I was hearing patients and students talk about how they felt about social media, and the pressure they felt to look a certain way based on comparing themselves to what other people posted. I was hearing from clients with eating disorders that they would see pro-anorexia content in their feeds and felt compelled to follow those types of accounts, even when they knew that it was very bad for their health."

So why does Social Media impact us this way?

Social media has a reinforcing nature. Using social media activates the reward center in our brains which releases dopamine. Dopamine is known as a 'feel-good chemical' and is linked to pleasurable activities, such as social interaction. By releasing dopamine, the brain can get addicted to this feeling, which is also closely linked to anxiety and depression.

The reason individuals keep coming back to social media, even though it can have negative impacts on mental health, is because the outcome is always unpredictable. When an outcome is unpredictable, the behaviour is more likely to repeat. For example with Instagram, the user does not know how many likes a picture will get, where, and when the picture will receive likes. The possibility of a desired outcome is what keeps users engaged with the platform. The platform boosts self-esteem and creates a sense of belonging between not only individual social circles but also a wider community; this, coupled with the prospect of future reward, is what begins the addictive nature of social media.

Challenges with Social Media for Mental Health

In a review of 43 studies in young people, many benefits of social media were cited, including increased self-esteem and opportunities for self-disclosure.[4] Yet, reported negative effects included an increased exposure to harm, social isolation, depressive symptoms, and bullying.[5]

Studies have highlighted that heavy and prolonged exposure to, and time spent on, social media platforms has a contributory effect on the increased risk of a variety of mental health symptoms and poor wellbeing, particularly among younger users of the platform.[6] Increased severity of anxiety and depressive symptoms can partially be attributed to the effects of increased screen time, and are not solely attributable to the use of a social media platform itself.[7]

Negative effects of social media use include social comparison pressure with others as well as increased feelings of isolation after being rejected by peers on social media.[8] Quantity of social media use is also an important factor, as highlighted in a survey of young adults aged 19 to 32, where more frequent visits to social media platforms each week were correlated with greater depressive symptoms.[9] More time spent using social media is also associated with greater symptoms of anxiety.[10]

Impacts of social media on daily life

The way in which individuals use social media has the ability to impact offline relationships and their interaction with everyday activities. One of the greatest threats to daily life from the use of social media is privacy and the consequences of disclosing so much information online.[1] The reported risks of social media use were directly related to many aspects of everyday life, including concerns about threats to employment, fear of stigma and being judged, impact on personal relationships, and facing hostility or being hurt.[12]

Final discussion

It is necessary to recognise that individuals with mental illness will continue to use social media given the ease of accessing these platforms and the immense popularity of online social networking. Being aware of the risks is an essential first step, before then recognizing that use of these platforms could contribute some benefits like finding meaningful interactions with others, engaging with peer support networks, and accessing information and services.

Emma Morhall

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1. Ahmed et al. (2019).
2. Aschbrenner et al. (2018); Birnbaum et al. (2017); Brunette et al. (2019); Naslund et al. (2016).
3. Bucci et al. (2019); Naslund et al. (2016).
4. Best et al. (2014).
5. Ibid.
6. Andreassen et al. (2016); Kross et al. (2013); Woods and Scott (2016).
7. Stiglic and Viner (2019).
8. Rideout and Fox (2018).
9. Lin et al. (2016).
10. Vannucci et al. (2017).
11. Naslund and Aschbrenner (2019).
12. Ibid.

THE POWER OF SAYING 'NO'

The first time that I realised the true impact lawyering can have on our mental health was during a Legal Foundations lecture. My unit coordinator emphasised that lawyers are amongst the professionals with the worst mental health in Australia. This frightened me as I did not want my future to form part of this statistic. After some reflection, I realised that if I wanted to pursue a career in law, I would need to create structures and habits throughout my studies to promote my mental wellbeing. I do not want to list 'googleable' self-care strategies so I will share my experience with mental health during my degree and some core beliefs and principles I manifest. After sharing my journey, I will focus on the liberation and the power of saying 'no'.

At the start of my degree, I had a lot of different stresses interplaying in my life. I had just returned from a 10-month gap year program overseas. This was difficult because I had to climatise to a different social environment and rebuild my connections. More significantly, I experienced serious health issues and had to undergo a highly invasive and traumatising surgery including a six-week period of challenging rehabilitation. At the same time, some other immediate family members experienced health issues which added extra personal stress to my situation. However, I wanted to regain structure and normality in my life. I said 'yes' to everything. I committed to a full-time law degree, worked long hours at work, decided to run a youth camp for 70 participants and filled my calendar with as much social activities as possible. At the time, I did not realise how this was impacting my mental wellbeing as I felt perfectly fine.

However, as I learnt, trauma and stress can manifest itself at obscure and unexpected times and, after feeling great for the whole year, suddenly, I woke up one day and felt awful. I had no energy or motivation to do anything for a significant amount of time. The doctor could not attach what was going on to anything physical, so it was boiled down to a stress-induced mental burnout.

Instead of viewing this period negatively, I decided to perceive it as a learning experience. Going through adversity teaches us resilience and self-awareness for our futures. Being mindful of the stress lawyering can entail, I have taken the time each day to prioritise my mental health for my current, as well as my future, mental state. As cliché as it may sound, whether it be journaling, doing exercise, meditating, or reading, I implore you to explore different strategies and schedule guilt free time each day to do something that brings you joy.

I would like to focus on the most valuable core belief that I learnt during this period – the belief in the power of saying 'no.' I believe saying 'no' is key to self-care and remaining the best version of yourself. Saying 'no' is something that I have struggled with in the past. However, as I have learnt, saying 'yes' to everything, despite relieving momentary discomfort, can be a recipe for disaster. Although saying 'no' can be difficult, like anything, it is a skill that can be developed over time.

I got better at saying 'no' through practice. When I went through my low period at the end of 2020 I was forced to say 'no' to many things due to having no energy. At first, I felt a lot of guilt and shame. However, over time I developed strategies to improve my self-talk. Instead of perceiving saying 'no' as 'I can't do as much as everyone else' or 'I am not a reliable person' or 'I am selfish,' which counterproductively made me feel worse, I perceived saying 'no' as a good thing. In fact, I saw saying 'no' as empowering. Saying 'no' meant that I had more time to do what I loved. Saying 'no' meant that I had more energy and could be more present in the things that I had committed or said 'yes' to. By no means have I mastered the skill of saying 'no,' but I am far better at it than I used to be. If you also struggle with saying 'no,' I encourage you to start doing it. Although it may feel hard and uncomfortable initially, the more that you do it, the easier it will become.

Our core beliefs also have a powerful impact on our actions. If you believe that mental health is a priority, you are much more likely to do things that promote your emotional wellbeing. Therefore, if you centrally believe that mental health is a priority, it will inevitably feel easier to say 'no' because it is justifiable.

Life can be challenging and stressful. As future legal professionals, we owe it to ourselves, and our clients, to prioritise our mental health. As Steve Jobs once said, "it's only by saying 'no' that you can concentrate on the things that are truly important." So, let's try to break the statistic about Australian lawyers' being amongst the professionals with the worst mental health and learn to unguilty say 'no.'

Judd Behr

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CURTIN UNIVERSITY**



MAINTAINING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP IN FAMILY LAW

Picture this: you sit across the table at your favourite restaurant, glass of wine in hand and your partner smiles sweetly and says "I want you to move in with me". What should be an exciting moment, is buried by the hundred's of questions and concerns raised almost instantly, because you know, this complicates things. What if this doesn't work? Will he take my savings, my car, my house? He is entitled to a share of the lottery I might win next year. Am I ready to share my hypothetical millions with this man? The Family Court Annual Report showed that 22,331 applications were filed in the 2020-2021 period.[1] If this relationship doesn't work out, will we be next?

Relationships are hard. But faced with the everyday reality that they fail makes it that little bit harder. Working in family law, you are constantly confronted with the cruelty of heart broken people. The ruins of failed relationships which you once believed to be rare now become the norm and makes it difficult to come home to your partner and not question if this is fleeting. It is important to recognise these feelings, but it doesn't mean you stop putting yourself out there.

While I am still new to the industry, here is what I have learnt so far to ensure you can continue to enjoy your job and your relationship:

1. Distance is Essential

Everyone talks about the importance of work-life balance, but family law takes this to a whole new level. There needs to be an off switch. I like to think of home and the office as two bubbles which I float between. At work I am focused on the issues other people have with their ex partners, the reasons things didn't work. I allow myself to be fully invested in these peoples stories. At the end of the work day, I have to leave it there. I take my time driving home. I let the things I have absorbed during the day dissolve with every kilometre I drive. When I open the front door I am wholly committed to what is happening inside. It is essential not to project the problems of others onto your own relationship - this isn't easy and takes practice but everyday you actively try to do this it gets easier.

2. Open Communication

It is important to discuss your thoughts, feelings and apprehensions with your significant other. While you can't discuss your clients with your partner, if there are common themes which come up in the relationship breakdowns you can address these concerns with your partner.

"I am concerned our disparity in income is going to cause resentment in our relationship - what can we do to address this before it becomes a problem?".

It is important to learn from the many couples you see each day and communicate with your partner these lessons to ensure you aren't hiding your fears or concerns.

3. Money is a factor in a relationship

This doesn't have to be a negative thing. I am an avid believer that money shouldn't be taboo, especially in a long-term relationship. Majority of the clients I work with allow money to go unspoken about, ultimately leading to relationship breakdowns. It is important to discuss your money goals and financial habits with your partner to make sure you are on the same page. While you do not have to hold financial goals or values, it is important to allow for open communication about this topic so you can work as a team and gain a better understanding about what each of you are working towards financially. Hiding anything from your partner can lead to resentment and distrust and money is no exception.

4. Successful relationships are still the majority

While the divorce rate in Australia is around 40%, it is important to recognise that still means the majority of relationships are lasting! Working in family law you see only unhappy couples, but you need to put this into perspective. You are working in a microcosm of failed relationships - it does not mean all relationships are doomed. In fact, it means you have been shown the path of what not to do and have been given the tools to ensure you have a successful and happy relationship.

Emily Grundy-Hyam

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UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**



SLEEP IS NOT A WASTE OF TIME!

Humans have evolved to include sleep as an integral part of life. We are better at almost anything when we get adequate sleep. However, humans have forgotten the purpose that sleep serves for decades on end. In this article, I'd like to show sleep-deprived beings, the morning larks, night owls and even those who prioritise adequate sleep, that sleep is not time wasted!

Sleep and Mindset Problems

In modern society, sleep carries a bad connotation. People associate adequate sleep with laziness and the absence of ambition. They also underestimate the value of sleep, equate being awake for more hours with productivity, and glorify their ability to function on fewer hours of sleep.

The Unhealthy Relationship Between Sleep and Students

When I say that I get 8-9 hours of sleep each day, I often get funny looks from my peers. People think that all law students are sleep deprived night owls, functioning on caffeine, sitting behind desks stacked with numerous case law and thick textbooks. They believe this is what hard work and success is supposed to look like.

Students tend to cut back on sleep more during the exam block to study and memorise content. But sleep affects learning, memory and decision making. Note the irony in this.

My friends often tell me they will catch up on their lost sleep during the holidays. The truth is that you cannot necessarily catch up on sleep.

Sleep is not time taken away from your life when you are awake. If anything, it serves a crucial purpose in your life. Efficiency is more about what and how much you get done in the time you have.

Dangers of Insufficient Sleep

We all need 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Statistics show that 2/3rds of the world's population suffers from chronic sleep deprivation. While in some cases, this is due to sleep disorders, it is mainly because people stretch their work, study hours or over-socialise.

When you don't get adequate sleep, it puts you at a higher risk of dementia, depression, mood disorders, learning & memory problems, heart disease, high blood pressure, weight gain and obesity, diabetes and even cancer! Losing sleep might not feel like a big deal in the moment. But it will pose severe risks to your health in the long run.

Benefits of Sufficient Sleep

"Even a soul submerged in sleep is hard at work and helps make something of the world." Heraclitus

Dr Mathew Walker, a professor of neuroscience and psychology and a pioneering researcher in the power of sleep, says that sleep is the most effective thing that we can do to replenish and reset our brains and bodies. When you are asleep, your body heals tissues, your brain gets rid of toxic waste, strengthens your memory, and affects every single system of the human body. You can waste time while you are awake, not while you are asleep. We spend 1/3rd of our lives sleeping to reap this myriad of benefits. If you live for 75 years, that's 25 years of your life.

Sleep for Success

Research suggests that sleep helps learning and recall in two significant ways:

1. After a good night's sleep, your brain is alert and has the capacity to draw new information. This new information will stay in your short-term memory.
2. Revision and mind maps alone are insufficient to consolidate what you learn. This is where the idiom "sleep on it" becomes relevant. During sleep, the brain replays the information you learned during the day and helps transfer information from short-term to long-term memory.

Take a laptop as an example. What happens if you keep twenty tabs open, don't charge it or restart it within a reasonable window of time? Chances are your laptop is lagging and not working efficiently. Your brain works similarly. This is proof that sufficient sleep is vital for success.

Tips for a Restful Slumber

1. Sleep schedule

Try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day. You can also keep a sleep diary to gain insight into your sleep quality and quantity and see if you meet your slumber needs.

2. Get your body moving

Whether choosing to walk to commute or going to the gym for 30 minutes to break a sweat, slotting in time each day to get your body moving will surprisingly make it easier for you to fall asleep each night.

3. Go outside

The modern-day tech world has made it harder for our bodies to recognise when it's time to rise and sleep. So, soak in some sunshine as often as you can. Not only will you benefit from a boost of vitamin D (depending on when you are going out) it will also help promote restful sleep at night.

4. Watch what you eat and drink

Neurosurgeon and author Dr Sanjay Gupta stated that you should avoid caffeine after 2.00 pm and avoid eating or drinking for three hours before bed to get undisturbed sleep.

5. Night-time routine

Take a warm shower, read a few pages of your favourite book or drink teas like chamomile, lemon balm, milk and honey in the evening. Having a night-time routine will signal to your body that you are getting ready to wind down and nod off for the day.

6. Visit a doctor

If you are not getting quality sleep and think you might be suffering from a sleep disorder, it's best to book an appointment with a doctor to seek professional help.

The bottom line is that adequate sleep is essential for your body to re-energise and perform at maximum capacity. It will also affect your overall well-being. Make an active effort to invest in a good night's sleep every day. Don't consider adequate sleep as an option or luxury. Treat it as a priority because sufficient sleep is not time wasted. You need to sleep in order to dream!

Sathyani Kotakadeniya

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THE PERFECT FACADE

The perfectionist mentality is an illusion that shrouds deep psychological dysfunction with academic and personal success. It is both praised and encouraged by those not suffering from it, while often bringing about paralyzing and debilitating mental states to those living with it. Prima facie, perfectionism may present itself as a high achieving, well liked and bright individual. These individuals are favoured by societal standards, and they flourish in abundance in academic landscapes. Success and accomplishments are positive attributes of perfectionism. However, underneath the outward facing and glamorous cloak of perfectionism can lie a dark web of mental illnesses, such as generalised anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, body dysmorphic disorder and major depressive disorder.[1] Perfectionism is a key suspect behind destructive psychological patterns.[2] Egan, Wade and Shafran's 2011 review of perfectionism identified that perfectionism is a 'transdiagnostic risk' which commonly accompanies multiple psychological and psychiatric disorders.[3]

Perfectionism usually goes hand-in-hand with the desire to appear perfect to the world. The consequence of this is the stigma that attaches to seeking help for mental health issues. Individuals that feel the need to present themselves in a perfectionistic way may feel as though they cannot disclose their difficulties with others as it could shatter the 'perfect facade' they have built - so instead, they will self-manage to get through. [4] It is only when things are extremely bad and almost impossible to hide that it becomes apparent that you cannot do this alone. These underground negative attitudes towards seeking professional help or even admitting to something being wrong is difficult, and sometimes it leads to living in denial that there is even anything wrong in the first place.

The word 'perfectionist' is a term that has been thrown around my whole life - and I don't disagree. One way that my perfectionist traits manifest themselves is in my Google Calendar. It is my pride and joy - I can tell you exactly what I was doing at any given time in the last three years. I always get compliments on my calendar, whether that be from my friends, work colleagues or in job interviews. On a 7 day weekly spread, having perfect little coloured blocks stacked together like Tetris brings me a niche sense of completeness and joy. I can constantly audit all the activities I do during the week and with one quick glance I can assess what I have and haven't been doing enough of during the week based on the colours of little blocks in my calendar. It is extremely accurate - if life 'gets in the way' and I haven't scheduled it into my calendar or added it to my day, I will retrospectively add it after the fact. There is nothing worse than an empty chunk in my calendar.

The perfectionist trait of excessive self-criticism turns into self-loathing, leading to procrastination and a constant feeling of guilt. When I'm not doing too well and I can't bring myself to watch a lecture, work on an assessment, see my friends or exercise - I am left with dreaded white spaces in my calendar. If my room is messy, my mind is messy and I find it difficult to concentrate, but being in a messy room makes me unmotivated and then I don't want to clean my room; a dangerous downward spiral.

As someone who is still working on detaching my sense of self-worth to how productive I am, these little blank parts of my calendar just make me feel worse. Perfectionism, for me, is a risk factor for other psychiatric conditions. As a girl who presents with perfectionistic characteristics, during my childhood I went about life with minimal intervention. It is only now, as a third year University student, that previously dormant symptoms of other conditions are becoming apparent. This is largely due to being able to mask symptoms under the guise of presenting with perfectionist traits.

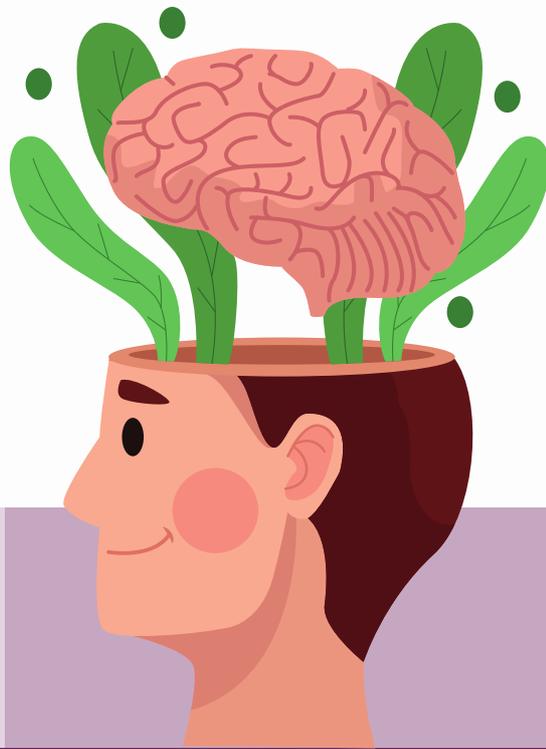
Unfortunately, law students and lawyers alike are creatures of perfectionism, and such perfectionist traits can have deleterious effects on one's study and work ethic. High standards, expectations of exactitude and attention to detail results in well-researched papers, perfect memorandums, and sharp advices to clients. Awards and accolades mask such traits, allowing perfectionism to be easily overlooked by family and friends. While the line between proof-reading and flawlessness is blurry for me, I am getting there.

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Be **CONFIDENT** in who you are and be **COURAGEOUS** in all that you do.

Be **KIND** to yourself and to those around you. Know that your limitations are self-prescribed and you **CAN** choose to overcome them.

Know that you are **BEAUTIFUL**, regardless of your imperfections and that you are so **LOVED** - just the way you are.

I encourage you to walk into today with a **GRATEFUL** heart and a **JOYFUL** spirit - knowing that you are **BLESSED** and that the right perspective has the power to change **EVERYTHING**.

Quote from
Giovanna Bongiorno
CURTIN UNIVERSITY

