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Taming the Pink Elephant: Jeena Cho's Mission of Mindfulness

Skills and Professional Development



"When you talk to lawyers there is always an elephant in the room: anxiety and its numerous siblings, which include stress, burnout, depression, insomnia, and others," says Jeena Cho, author of [The Anxious Lawyer: An 8-Week Guide to a Joyful and Satisfying Law Practice Through Mindfulness and Meditation](#). Law is a notoriously high-stress field, yet there is still a pervasive stigma with the subject of mental disorders, such as anxiety and depression. Lawyers suffer from many of these afflictions in relative isolation, and even talking about them seems to be considered a weakness.

"I remember when I started practicing law and suffered from anxiety," Cho says. "I kept thinking, I can't be the only one! Why are we not addressing this problem and giving lawyers tools to thrive? Why are we not teaching simple techniques and tools that can improve the lives of many lawyers?" Cho made it her mission to educate lawyers about simple and inexpensive tools to help them face the elephant plaguing their lives and practices: mindfulness and meditation.



According to Cho, “Our minds are noisy places and we blindly believe everything that passes through them, even thoughts that are random and don’t make sense. Meditation allows you to systematically examine your thoughts and objectively analyze them.” It also helps practitioners look at their thoughts with a critical eye, see any patterns their minds follow, notice tendencies, and develop an open mind. This process can proactively improve how they approach both their lives and others.

“I recommend meditation to every lawyer,” Cho urges. “There are no side effects and nothing to lose. It is a simple, cheap, and portable tool that can be used anywhere. So, why not give it an honest try?” It’s easy to begin incorporating meditation into your daily routine, even for lawyers with loaded schedules: all you have to do is to commit to a daily practice of two minutes for twenty days. “Doing it once or occasionally is not enough,” Cho explains. “It is like throwing in the towel after you visit a gym once. To see any results you need to commit to a regular meditation practice, even if it is a very short one.”

And the results of meditation are well worth the twenty-day trial. Those who persist with their practice will notice a “shift in perspective,” which manifests itself over time in many ways:

Gaining more clarity.

“Operating in a culture that values logic and reason, we naturally spend a great deal of time thinking,” Cho says. This means that unless we consciously observe our thoughts, we may fail to realize they are separate from ourselves. This is especially true for lawyers, who are trained to think at breakneck speed. Meditation helps us realize that we have the choice to distance ourselves from our thoughts and not get caught up in it. According to Cho, “Observing our thoughts allows us to see directly that the mind has a natural clarity.” This gives us more “spaciousness” in our minds, which allows us to become familiar with the mind’s natural rhythms and embrace “moments of open awareness.” These moments, Cho says, “allow our mind to rejuvenate, give us an opportunity to exercise choice about where to put our focus, and make space for our own natural wisdom to surface.”

Realizing that thoughts are different from reality.

Cho notes that it’s difficult to recognize our thoughts aren’t always real. For a lawyer whose entire career is based on handling issues and adversaries, this can lead to an overwhelming amount of negativity. Cho lists some negative thoughts that plague lawyers: “Their clients are all helpless; judges’ rulings are always arbitrary; that opposing counsel is diabolical; changing jobs will inevitably lead to financial disaster.” When we take these thoughts as reality, we allow them to run our lives. Meditation helps us frame thoughts for what they are: creations of our own minds. This allows us to choose which thoughts to believe and which to let go of, giving us back control of our own minds and lives.

Taking thought patterns less seriously.

According to Cho, practicing meditation over time shows us the patterns of our thoughts. “You’ll very likely start to notice you always think certain thoughts in reaction to certain types of events,” Cho says. “Whenever a deadline looms, you always begin to feel let down by others. Or whenever you get recognition, you immediately worry that there are unstated strings attached.” Meditation can help us combat these patterns when they lead to negative thoughts. For example, Cho says, you may think, “I’m a bad parent” every time you have to work late. Once you learn that this is just a snap judgement, not necessarily a reflection of reality, you are free to handle situations as they come.

Since Cho began her journey, meditation and mindfulness has become more mainstream — understandable, considering its multiple benefits! “Other professionals are also using this ancient practice to improve leadership skills and collaboration, and to decrease healthcare costs,” says Cho. “Some of the companies that are offering mindfulness training include Google, Salesforce, Aetna, Goldman Sachs Group, Blackrock, and Bank of America.” She has also noticed that attorneys are increasingly more open-minded when it comes to using meditation to improve focus, productivity, and quality of life. But Cho shows no signs of slowing down her mission. Instead, she sees this as an opportunity to promote meditation and mindfulness training at firms and in law schools. More widespread mindfulness training could ease the stigma of anxiety and depression in lawyers and lead the legal profession to a healthier, more productive future. “It just makes sense to teach these skills!” she says.



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