



The Hope of a New Season

BY AMY PHILLIPS

I've heard in many circles recently that we're all getting a little tired of "change," "unprecedented times," and "navigating the unknown." The world we once knew has been turned on its side, and predictable patterns we once relied on are now a thing of the past. On top of that, the "new normal" we were promised still seems just out of reach.

While the difficulties of the legal profession might not go away anytime soon, we can address them with simple yet profoundly effective strategies to navigate upcoming changes and capitalize on the ways we've already learned to grow and adapt. Many within the legal profession are planning for approaching transitions, from job moves to hybrid workplace models and new ways of integrating work and home life, to the current winter season and the new year.

Thankfully, we at the Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP) have also observed growth as the goodness and compassion of humanity have risen to the occasion within each

of us, our families, our communities, and even the legal profession itself. These adaptations allow for greater strength and resiliency as we move forward in 2022.

Tending to Our Routines

During times of change, our routines can either keep us grounded and focused or show us that what we've been doing is no longer working and we need different strategies to navigate new seasons. Tuning into how things such as movement, food, music, social media, and news consumption impact your moods, emotions, and energy levels will help you optimize such transitions.

In with the New

Note what is working well for you and commit to doing more of those things. Build in mental and physical "commute time" even when you're not going somewhere different. Get up from your chair and move around. Go into a different

room, engage with nature if possible, and move by stretching, deep breathing, or taking a quick walk.

If you're a leader within your organization, encourage your entire department, team, or firm/agency to adopt the practice of building in 10 minutes of "commute time" between meetings. These behaviors will help you to quickly reset after difficult interactions so you don't carry lingering negativity and stress into your next meeting, but they are equally important for all meetings, even the good ones!

While your days and weeks may be in flux right now, you can still find ways to create a sense of routine and predictability. Create sensory cues that signal to yourself, and even your family, that you're transitioning to and from work. This can include a playlist of songs that influence a positive mind-set and outlook, journaling at the end of the day or before you start the weekend, or making like Mr. Rogers and changing those clothes as soon as you arrive

home or stop working (cardigan weather is in full-swing, after all!).

Engage in mindful moments. The research is in, and meditation, mindfulness, and yoga practices are scientifically proven methods for reducing stress and increasing emotional regulation, cognition, and overall well-being. No time for these? Not for you? No problem. You can benefit from these practices by focusing all your senses on something in the present for just a few moments at a few set points throughout the day. Listen to water infusing the soil of your plants and notice how they have grown and shifted toward their light source. Or, as one of my favorite professors in graduate school, Dr. Barry Koch, would encourage—stop, breath, and watch your pet fully enjoy that treat you gave them before moving on to your next obligation. If it has been an especially long or stressful day, give them a second treat.

Capitalize on the winter rituals that most matter to you and your family, or build in new ones to carry forward. Reflect on what traditions are most meaningful to you, and—whether it's with your partner, children, local neighborhood/community organization, nieces and nephews, AA family, friends, or pets—build those traditions back in. This could mean taking the essence of a childhood memory that's dear to you and creatively adapting the practice to your reality, here and now. For others, it could mean adopting a brand-new tradition you heard about that resonated for you. (The possibilities are truly endless here!)

Out with the Old

Times of great change are also a wonderful opportunity to discard any bad (or just un-enjoyable) habits we may have. Are there any habits you have unintentionally fallen into that are detracting from the space you want to be in? Do you find yourself drinking or using substances to cope more than you would like? Have you isolated from real relationships or spiritual connections and instead turned to mindless scrolling through social media to numb out the day's events? Try connecting with a positive friend, family member, or spiritual support rather than falling down obscure social media black holes. Seek support from COLAP or

re-engage with your therapist or peer support group if you're concerned about your substance intake or other maladaptive behaviors.

It's also important to note where your energy and attention are going and give yourself permission to “not be everything to everyone at the same time.” (It's really *not* possible.) As therapist Ashley Baldwin notes in her recent article, “The Art of Balance”:

[F]inding a balance is hard. You will always be juggling multiple balls in the air; work, relationship, self-care, etc. Some of these balls are plastic and some are glass and it is important to know which are which. You can drop the plastic ones and pick them up later and they will be okay, but you can't put the glass ones back together. Do you have a big trial next week? This may be your glass ball for a week, and you may have to drop some plastic balls of helping with homework every night. Does your child have a big concert or sporting event? This may be your glass ball that day and the emails at work may be the plastic ball. Understanding which are which can help you prioritize while also giving yourself grace.¹

This can go a long way toward realistically sustaining both work and personal lives and commitments.


Nurturing Our Relationships

Equally important to tending to our routines is nurturing our relationships. Don't “go it alone.” It's normal to want to isolate under chronic stress and trauma exposure, but it isn't helpful. In *Dare to Lead*, Brené Brown attacks the myth of going it alone: “From our mirror neurons to language, we are a social species. In the absence of authentic connection, we suffer. And by authentic, I mean the kind of connection that doesn't require hustling for acceptance and changing who we are to fit in.”² To be effective, this must be an intentional endeavor that is consistently exercised and nurtured over time, like any skill or muscle.

If you, like many, find your inner circle has dwindled during what has been a season of isolation, now is the time to shed that layer of defense and actively seek out new supports. Engage with the Colorado Attorney Mentoring

Program (CAMP)—either as a mentor or a mentee—or seek out someone you respect and whose values you would like to emulate and see if they would be willing to take you on as a mentee. Join that supportive group for working parents or engage with a hobby or project that allows you to reconnect with safe and positive community, even if virtually.

It's Okay Not to be Okay

Above all else, don't ignore the hard situations and emotions, nor the grief and the loss that you may be experiencing. It's okay to struggle; after all, you're human, and the past few years have been hard on everyone, including the legal community. But you need not suffer alone, and it's important to make space for joy, growth, and renewal even when they sit alongside the grief and hurt. If you would like support or resources while building your well-being plan, call COLAP at (303) 986-3345 or email info@coloradolap.org for a free, confidential well-being consultation. And review the Task Force Report from Colorado Supreme Court's Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being for inspiring well-being recommendations for the legal community.³ 



Amy Phillips is the assistant director for COLAP. She is a Colorado native with over 15 years' experience serving individuals, families, and professionals working within the intersections of the courts, child welfare, behavioral health, and trauma. Phillips received her BA from the University of Hawai'i-Hilo and her MSW and MBA from Newman University. She is a licensed clinical social worker and a Colorado-licensed addiction counselor.

Coordinating Editor: Sarah Myers, smyers@coloradolap.org

NOTES

1. Baldwin, “The Art of Balance,” *The Docket* 8 (Feb./Mar. 2021), https://issuu.com/dbadocket/docs/docket_febmar2021_issuu.
2. Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work, Tough Conversations, Whole Hearts* at 25 (Random House 2018).
3. Colorado Supreme Court Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, Colorado Lawyer Well-Being (Nov. 2021), https://www.coloradosupremecourt.com/PDF/AboutUs/WellBeing/Well-Being_Report_Nov2021_Release_Final.pdf.