



Balancing the Scales: Navigating the Legal Profession with Family, Health, and Happiness in Mind

BY WHITNEY E. SHORT, ESQ., AND AMANDA L. STEVENS, ESQ.

The legal profession is demanding with long hours, high stakes, and constant pressure to perform at high levels. In this environment, achieving balance among personal life, health, and work can seem elusive. However, it is not only achievable, but essential to sustain a successful and fulfilling career.

Known Struggles: Health-Work Balance

The balance between work and health is a familiar challenge, not just for lawyers, but also for professionals across all industries. We all know that health is important but achieving that balance amidst the pressure of work can be difficult. Legal professionals face particular stressors, including long hours, strict deadlines, client demands, emotionally charged situations, and the need to stay up to date with constantly evolving laws.

In fact, in a 2022 study, the American Bar Association found that lawyers reported experiencing burnout in their profession more than half of the time.¹ Lawyers are also 3.6 times more likely to experience depression compared to those in other professions.² These numbers speak to the intense pressures of the job.

Moreover, it is common for lawyers to work 50-to-80-hour weeks, leaving little time for family, friends, and self-care. These demanding schedules, combined with mental and emotional loads, often lead to physical or emotional burnout, putting both your professional and personal life in jeopardy. For female attorneys, the pressure is sometimes compounded by the expectations of managing family life. Managing career advancement with personal priorities can make this balance especially challenging.

Prioritizing Family and Health

Despite the pressure of work, making time for family and health is crucial for long-term success. Without a healthy and balanced life, your professional performance will eventually suffer. According to the World Health



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Organization, the effects of work-life imbalance are not just limited to a decrease in professional capability but can also affect your physical well-being.³ The best gift you can give your family, and even your clients, is your health and longevity.

Tips from Personal Experience

- **Wellness Days:** Setting aside a regular “wellness day” can be invaluable. Taking time off to rest, recharge, and prioritize your health helps avoid the dreaded burnout and boosts your productivity when you return to work. Small adjustments like setting aside time for relaxation, such as a quick massage, stretching, or even deep breathing exercises during breaks can help re-energize you and your team.

- **Get Outside:** Nature has been proven to be a remarkable way of rejuvenating mental and physical health. Taking short walks around the office or stepping outside for even 10 minutes can help clear your mind, reduce stress, and improve cognitive functions.⁴ One of the best ways to combine wellness and productivity is through outdoor or walking meetings. These meetings not only provide a refreshing change of scenery, but also encourage creative thinking, enhance focus, and promote overall physical and mental health.
- **Schedule Time for Health:** Treat exercise like an essential work appointment. Block out time in your calendar, whether it’s going to the gym or taking your kids to

an activity. Once it’s scheduled, you’ll be more likely to stick to it. At Short & Stevens Law, we block out time in our calendars to ensure we prioritize health, whether it is a walk during lunch, hitting the gym, or taking time to engage in physical activities outside the office.

- **Reframe Your Thinking:** Rather than saying “I don’t have time,” reframe it to “I’m not willing to make the time.” At our firm, we believe in the importance of setting realistic expectations for both ourselves and our clients. Acknowledging that you have control over how you spend your time allows you to prioritize what truly matters.

The Value of Giving Back

As lawyers, being involved in our communities can be important and research supports the idea that giving back is beneficial for everyone involved.⁵ Community involvement not only helps strengthen local networks but can also lead to greater personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Engaging with the community can provide a sense of purpose and connection, both of which can contribute to reducing stress and improving mental health.⁶ For lawyers, community service can be an opportunity to broaden one’s network, showcase knowledge, and build goodwill.

Examples of How Firms Can Connect with the Community

- **Networking:** Lawyers can engage with the local community through networking events, volunteering as a judge for mock trial competitions, or volunteering for charitable causes. These actions not only help you build a positive image but also foster deeper relationships with potential clients or other professionals.
- **Education:** Law firms can contribute to their communities by offering educational workshops or seminars. This approach increases your visibility and positions you as trusted and approachable figures in the community.

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- **Pro Bono and Learning New Areas of Law:** By taking pro bono cases, lawyers can connect with their community while gaining hands-on experience in new areas of the law. Pro bono work can often involve working with clients who might otherwise not have access to legal services. This helps build a positive reputation and offers opportunities for professional growth.
- **Involve Your Family:** Community engagement does not mean you have to do it alone. Get your family involved in community-service projects, such as volunteering at your local food bank or organizing a donation event. It's a wonderful opportunity to spend time together while making a positive impact.

Redefining Professional Success

Traditionally, success in the legal field is measured by money, accolades, and prestige. However, these external markers often come at the cost of personal happiness and health. In today's world, a more holistic approach to success is gaining traction, one that includes not only financial achievement, but also work-life balance, personal well-being, and meaningful relationships.

- **Time:** One of the most precious resources we have is time. Lawyers often find themselves sacrificing it for work, but what if professional success was redefined to include more time for family, health, and personal interests? Prioritizing time away from the office can lead to greater focus and productivity when you are working, making it possible to do high-quality work in a shorter amount of time.
- **Money:** We get it, financial success is important, but it doesn't have to come at the expense of everything else. Redefining success means focusing on

efficiency, not just earning more. For instance, rather than taking on every case or client, a lawyer might choose fewer cases but focus on those that align with their values or offer a better work-life balance.

- **Independent Work and Help:** The importance of getting help cannot be overstated. Lawyers who do their job well should also hire professionals who do their job well. This means delegating tasks, such as administrative duties, to others who specialize in those areas. By focusing on your strengths and trusting others with their expertise, you can improve both the quality of your work and your personal life.
- **Under-promise, Over-perform:** One of the most effective ways to redefine success is by setting realistic expectations and then exceeding them. By under-promising and over-performing, lawyers can maintain credibility while reducing stress. This practice helps manage client expectations and allows room for self-care.
- **Maintain Flexibility:** Flexible work arrangements are key to a balanced career. For instance, we intentionally structure our work week so that Fridays are set aside for administrative tasks, self-care, or family time. This boundary allows us to maintain productivity and work-life balance without feeling overwhelmed.

The legal profession may be demanding, but it is possible to find balance. By prioritizing needs, redefining professional success, and focusing on efficiency and quality work, lawyers can build sustainable and fulfilling careers. It's not about doing it all, it's about doing what matters most. Take care of yourself, invest in your relationships, and remember that success is about more than just money and accolades.

ENDNOTES:

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WHITNEY E. SHORT AND AMANDA L. STEVENS met during law school at the William S. Boyd School of Law at UNLV and have been active members of the State Bar of Nevada since graduating in 2015. The two opened Short & Stevens Law, which practices exclusively in the areas of estate planning, probate, business law, and real estate law.

