



FLORIDA BAR NEWS

THE MINDFUL LAWYER: DON'T BE AFRAID TO OUT YOURS

By Scott Rogers ▶ Special to the News ▶ Columns

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One of the great joys of teaching is when the student becomes the teacher. A few years ago, at a mindfulness in law conference, I found myself sitting next to Amanda Leipold, a former student who, a decade earlier, was among the first to enroll in Miami Law's mindfulness class for 1L's. The next semester, Amanda and three classmates, John Ainsworth, Nicole Crabtree, and Maraisay Rodriguez, established the nation's first law student mindfulness organization as they wished to continue to meet regularly and share what they were learning and practicing with other students. A few years later Amanda and I attended the American Association of Law School's Annual Conference and participated in a panel discussion on student-faculty collaborations in which Amanda eloquently offered inspiring and useful information to a room of educators on how she and her classmates came together to bring balance into their law school experience.

It came as no surprise when she caught me up on her life and career and how she was now bringing mindfulness into her organization. I was taken with the thoughtfulness of her approach and its effectiveness. As law groups, corporations, and other organizations which have introduced their team members to mindfulness and meditative practices look for ways to offer a more enduring set of wellness options, holding a weekly meditation group is worthy of consideration. It can be low cost, limited in time, responsive to those with an interest, and a meaningful experience for most, if not all, who attend. The challenge for many is knowing how to get one started.

As Amanda has been doing just this in her organization for several years, I asked if she would share some of her thoughts and ideas for doing so.

When I started law school at the University of Miami in 2009, I promised myself I would take care of my physical and mental wellbeing. Partly, that meant waking up early every morning to practice meditation and to never tell a soul about it. The culture of work hard and "tough it out" was strong even in law school

and I thought my meditation practice would make me seem weak or strange to my classmates. However, we all know this workaholic “tough it out” attitude results in some of the highest rates of alcoholism and depression within our profession. My first day of orientation, Scott told us about his program and laid out the benefits mindfulness meditation can offer law students. After taking his mindfulness class, a small group of us formed a mindfulness student group called the Insightful Mind Initiative to hold group meditation sessions and discussions. Eleven years later, the group still exists on campus and facilitating those sessions remains one of my proudest memories of my law school experience.

I mentioned the Insightful Mind Initiative on my resume and more than one prospective employer has asked me about it. In my current position as in-house counsel for a not-for-profit health insurer, my leadership was so enthused they asked me to do a presentation for 300 leaders from my company on the benefits of meditation. From that presentation I received dozens of requests from department heads to do similar sessions for their teams. One executive vice president who had recently had a stroke and was looking for ways to reduce stress set up regular guided meditation sessions with me at the office and I began offering weekly 7:45 a.m. guided meditation sessions for anyone in my company who wanted to attend. Now the program has grown to three sessions per week, held in at different times of the day and in different buildings to accommodate everyone. We also allow attendees to call into the session to accommodate remote workers. The sessions last about 15 minutes and we generally have been 5-10 people at each session.

As a facilitator, I have a rotation of my favorite guided meditation that I like to do. As I grow in my own practice, the guided meditations change and adapt. Sometimes I try something new and it does not work, and sometimes I go back to old favorites upon request. After every session I ask the group if there are any observations they would like to share. This gives folks an opportunity to share their experience and make any comments on the session. I am always encouraging others who are experienced with meditation to try their hand as facilitator. Many folks have years of experience with their own practice and have much to offer the group. You too may have a meditation practice but have not mentioned it to anyone at work. I encourage you to share your practice with your co-workers. Carving out space and time within your workplace to be in the present moment through meditation may be one of the most important initiatives you take on.

I asked Amanda for a few tips and she replied:

1. *Don't be afraid to out yourself as a meditator. It is a strength!*
2. *Find a leader who can champion the initiative.*
3. *Ensure you have a fairly quiet space and pick a time when you won't be interrupted.*
4. *Get the word out on the benefits of meditation.*
5. *Have a plan, hold it loosely, and allow the sessions to morph as necessary.*

You can imagine my delight in learning from Amanda the ways she has meaningfully enriched her work environment and culture — along with serving as in-house counsel — and I am grateful to her for crafting such a helpful response.

If you are interested in learning more about effective ways to meaningfully introduce weekly meditation sessions to your firm, or to join in the weekly video Zoom meditation that we offer at Miami Law, let me know. And, as Amanda is interested in sharing her experience with others, you can reach out to her at amandaleipold@gmail.com.

When the student becomes the teacher!

If you have a question about mindfulness and integrating it into the practice of law that you would like answered in this column, send it to srogers@law.miami.edu.



*Scott Rogers, M.S., J.D., is a nationally recognized leader in the area of mindfulness in law and founded and directs the University of Miami School of Law's Mindfulness in Law Program where he teaches mindful ethics, mindful leadership, mindfulness and negotiation, and mindfulness in law. He is the creator of Jurisight, one of the first CLE programs in the country to integrate mindfulness and neuroscience and conducts workshops and presentations on the role of mindfulness in legal education and across the legal profession. He is author of the recently released, **"The Mindful Law Student: A Mindfulness in Law Practice Guide,"** written for all audiences.*