The Mindful Lawyer: Not Your Usual Law Conference

By Timothy Testa

I f the end of October, I attended a two-day and a half-day program hosted by UC Berkeley School of Law. It was sponsored by a number of entities including the law schools at the University of Baltimore, City University of New York, University of Florida and University of San Francisco. There were participating law professors from UC Berkeley, Hastings College of the Law, University of Florida, Temple College of Law, University of Denver, Creighton University, Seton Hall, University of Missouri, and Vanderbilt. Over 175 participants were drawn to the conference from the ranks of private law firms, large and small, in-house counsel, public interest firms, mediators, public agency lawyers, district attorneys, and law students. Participants also included a former chief justice of the Utah Supreme Court, a U.S. District Court judge, a justice from the Arizona Court of Appeals and senior staff from the U.S. District Court, Northern California District.

At the conference included improving professional skills, enhancing client services, building diversity, raising a deeper commitment to ethical practice, and enhancing attorney satisfaction and well being. We were joined by clinical psychologist Philipe Goldman of Stanford University and Shweta Shah, professor of counseling psychology at Santa Clara University.

And, if the title didn’t already give it away, the conference included Hannah Brencher, Zan Onek, founder of the San Francisco Zen Center, poet and author of “Saving Home: Using the Wisdom of Home to Navigate Life’s Hurdles and Afflictions,” and Jacob Rinkoff, co-founder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, and author of numerous books including “Path with Heart” and “Waking Up, Cleaning Out, the Laundry.”

What sets the extraordinary and eclectic group of legal minds together was the desire to meet with other legal professionals from throughout the country to learn from those engaged in meditation or other contemplative practices and to learn from one another about how our own practices and those of other legal professionals affected our legal careers and lives. For almost a decade, a small group of legal professionals has met two days a year for a few days every other year to develop a law practice that incorporates contemplative practices. Other retreats have been held in the East. Under the leadership of the California State Bar, the conference was conceived to expand the national interest law movement and an innovator in professional education, and now Schorr in Residence at UC Berkeley School of Law, a national audience was convened to share experiences, to create a broader community of interest and to advance to the broader legal community the benefits that we all have experienced through our respective practices.

Our legal work lives and contemplative practices have their roots in religious and spiritual disciplines, these practices can be, and most frequently are, entirely secular. Buddhism, which generally is considered in the west to be a form of religion, is most often considered in the west to be psychology. Meditation frequently retain the religious orientation of their upbring from Judaism to Catholicism to agnosticism.

What mediators have to share, irrespective of their spiritual orientation, is a desire to quiet the mind to gain greater clarity for insight. The Bay Area Working Group on Law and Meditation, a small group of practicing lawyers, judges, legal educators and mediators, has been meeting monthly for over seven years with Norman Fischer to explore how meditation has impacted their lives and the profession. Their work has spawned discussions at the annual California meditation networks, sponsored by Spirit Rock Meditation Center and the Center for Contemplative Minds in Society.

As part of the conference material, the Working Group issued its first book last fall. The book, based on the experiences of those attending the conference, the Working Group material and meditation literature, the Working Group has issued its first book.


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(Edward Code Sec 525.1.) However, the author and other “asset planners” advise their clients about their risks before they give advice about “protecting” assets. Rather, they should consider the risk to their own careers, law and other licenses, and personal mediation perspective, not only in their career, but also throughout their lives. I wanted to make you aware of this conference because of the great hope it offers our profession, not because there are a growing number of mediators engaged in the practice of law, but for the fact that there are as many extraordinary talented individuals in the practice of law who are seeking to make it more creative, more moral, more ethical and more effective.

I look forward to this conference, and future opportunities to become involved in the community. direct your attention to www.mindfullawyersconference.com.

Letter to the Editor

Asset Planners Should Take Heed

In his article “The Emotional Intelligence of Suffering Wisdom,” published in the Nov. 24 edition of the Daily Journal of Record (the [chief] editor to go to face civil penalties), explained the need to “caring,” with regard to “suffering wisdom” in the expected claim of approximately $20 million for a personal guarantee of a failed real estate investment.

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