

Finding Happiness and High Performance in the Law

Who Can Benefit from This Book?	2
Is This Book for Everyone?	3
Summary of Chapters	4
How to Use This Book	6
Key Takeaways	6

This book maps out how law students can improve their performance, health, and happiness in law school and beyond. In the pages that follow, I will argue that you should invest in your own wellbeing, both as an inherently valuable goal and as a path to success in law school and the legal profession. My analysis is grounded in the growing body of data on law student and lawyer wellbeing, the science of positive psychology (particularly the psychology of high performance), and nearly two decades of my own experience and observations as a lawyer and law professor—more specifically, my experience in helping law students improve their happiness and their grades by adopting evidence-based strategies for increasing wellbeing. Law school is challenging, but it can and should also be fun, fascinating, and fulfilling.

Who Can Benefit from This Book?

As a law student, you are a very busy person. Moreover, you’ve probably already received a lot of law school advice from classmates, mentors, professors, parents, friends, and the Internet. So why should you invest the time to read this book and take the information it presents seriously? Because it will help you create better outcomes and a better life in law school and in the legal profession. In fact, when I teach “Happiness and the Law” as an upper-year seminar, one of the most frequent comments I receive from students is that the course should be offered in first year and should be mandatory. They believe that the kind of information we will cover here is indispensable for any law student. In my opinion, this book will be most useful to the following readers:

- Students who want to maximize their academic performance in law school and their professional success once they graduate.
- Students who are struggling with the stress of law school and want to build a toolkit for improving their happiness and wellbeing.
- Students who are happy, healthy, and satisfied with their academic results and just want to maintain that high level of success in law school and beyond.

First, a lawyerly disclaimer: I am not suggesting that every law student who reads this book and implements the practices I describe here will end up with straight As. And you don’t need straight As—or any As for that matter—to have a successful career in the law. However, if you are not happy with your grades or have a sense that you haven’t yet realized your full potential as a law student, there is a good chance that you could raise your GPA by as much as a full letter grade by following the advice you will find here. A large and persuasive body of scientific evidence has shown that cultivating wellbeing in the ways I describe in this book will improve your learning, memory, productivity, problem-solving skills, and academic performance. And the excellent news is that you’ll do it by creating more joy in your life, increasing the efficiency and efficacy of your study strategies, and finding more meaning in your law school journey.

If you picked up this book because you're struggling with mental health challenges in law school, know that you are not alone. Research from multiple countries has shown that law students often begin with average or above average levels of mental wellbeing but develop significant symptoms of anxiety or depression within their first year of law school.¹ Although the causes of law student distress are not fully understood, they likely include a heavy workload, competitive/comparative thinking, high-stakes assignments, lack of ongoing feedback, financial stress, institutional biases, and the decrease in self-esteem that results from the sudden transition from being an exceptional student to being "average."²

To be honest, sometimes the problem is us, not you. Although law faculties are full of brilliant scholars and groundbreaking advocates, legal education has not evolved as quickly or progressively as other streams of higher education. If you think that some of our methods are antiquated or unhelpful, you are probably right. Where structural problems exist (e.g., outdated pedagogy, excessive/unrealistic workloads, institutional racism, financial barriers), they should be addressed through systemic solutions. The ideas advanced in this book are meant to complement, not replace, the ongoing transformation of legal education through updating teaching methods, decolonizing the legal curriculum, increasing representation of racialized peoples among the study body and faculty, making law school facilities and materials accessible to students and faculty with disabilities, sensitizing law professors to appropriate gendering of students, and so on. I would encourage you to advocate for these kinds of changes as your time and emotional resources allow.

However, if you are reading this book then you are probably in law school now or will be there very soon, and I don't think you should have to wait for the wholesale reform of legal education to find improvements in your own wellbeing and performance. The strategies presented here will help you optimize your own happiness and success as much as possible within our dynamic, evolving, and imperfect law schools.

Is This Book for Everyone?

A final note before we get going: you do not need to be a budding Zen master, productivity expert, or varsity athlete to benefit from the tools and techniques we will cover here. Even if you face significant challenges, you can still improve your

1 See e.g. David Jaffe et al, "It's Okay to Not Be Okay": The 2021 Survey of Law Student Well-Being" (2022) 60 U Louisville L Rev 439; A Lester et al, "Health and Wellbeing in the First Year: The Law School Experience" (2011) 36:1 Alt LJ 47. See also A Bergin & K Pakenham, "Law Student Stress: Relationships Between Academic Demands, Social Isolation, Career Pressure, Study/Life Imbalance and Adjustment Outcomes in Law Students" (2015) 22:3 Psychiatry, Psychol & L 388.

2 See Kathryn Young, *How to Be (Sort of) Happy in Law School* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018) at 9-23.

happiness and success by taking a wellbeing-informed approach to your legal studies. At the start of my own law school journey, I had a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome and was struggling with anxiety and depression. I sought help—repeatedly—and developed a routine of wellbeing practices that both increased my own happiness and allowed me to maximize my grades. I ended up graduating at the top of my class, but more importantly, I found real joy and satisfaction in my legal studies, and I have since enjoyed a fascinating and fulfilling career as a lawyer and law professor.

If you feel bruised or even broken by law school, you can still benefit from the habits and practices discussed in this book. Some of you will need to supplement these tools with temporary or ongoing help from physicians, psychologists, learning specialists, Indigenous Elders, or professional mentors. All of you have the right to enjoy law school and your legal practice. My hope is that the remaining chapters will assist you in this worthy endeavour.

Summary of Chapters

The core of this book will set out the specific building blocks of happiness and high performance in law school and the profession. Chapter 2 introduces the convincing body of data demonstrating that cognitive, academic, and professional performance improves with happiness and wellbeing. In other words, when we feel good, we are smarter, faster, and more likely to succeed. I'll describe exciting studies showing how accuracy, productivity, efficiency, creative problem solving, resilience, grades, and professional advancement are all enhanced by a positive state of mind and body.³ Chapter 3 explores the key physical foundations of wellbeing and high performance in law school, introducing simple lifestyle hacks (e.g., optimal sleep, exercise, and nutrition) that are proven to be highly effective in preventing and mitigating mental health problems, uplifting mood, improving cognitive function, and increasing students' GPAs.⁴ To bring this data down to earth in the law school context, we will apply the relevant research to specific law school scenarios (e.g., how to eat, sleep, and exercise to prepare for a three-hour, 100 percent final examination).

3 See e.g. Andrew Oswald et al, "Happiness and Productivity" (2015) 33 J Lab Econ 789; Shawn Achor, *The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2010).

4 See e.g. Khurshid A Khurshid, "Bi-Directional Relationship Between Sleep Problems and Psychiatric Disorders" (2016) 46:7 Psychiatric Annals 385; Shelly D Hershner & Ronald D Chervin, "Causes and Consequences of Sleepiness Among College Students" (2014) 6 Nat Sci Sleep 73; Heidi Godman, "Regular Exercise Changes the Brain to Improve Memory, Thinking Skills" (9 April 2014), online (blog): <<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/regular-exercise-changes-brain-improve-memory-thinking-skills-201404097110>>.

Chapter 4 will highlight the benefits of choosing your mindset as much as possible in law school, including busting imposter syndrome and giving up perfectionism.⁵ It will introduce you to self-compassion, explain why it is necessary for law students and lawyers, and describe evidence-based ways to become more compassionate toward yourself.⁶ It will also explain the key concept of mindfulness, how to achieve it, and why it matters. Chapter 5 will make an evidence-based argument that your best chance of succeeding and remaining well in law school is to stay human by cultivating social connection, staying true to your own values, making space for your emotions, and getting help whenever you need it.⁷ Once again, it turns out that students who make time for these crucial forms of self-care tend to do better academically than those who do not.

Chapter 6 will set out the most efficient and effective study strategies for law school, based on findings from the cognitive science of learning and memory. As you've probably noticed, many students are overwhelmed by the volume and difficulty of material in law school despite their very high levels of intelligence and diligence. This chapter will offer proven strategies for improving academic performance (e.g., self-testing, spaced repetition, taming digital distraction,⁸ and making the most of your professors).⁹ By implementing these strategies, you can improve your academic performance and have more fun in law school. Chapter 7 will assist you in navigating the complex, exciting, and sometimes stressful process of designing your legal career. Most of you went to law school with the goal of becoming lawyers, and all of you want to benefit from your legal education and thrive in your careers (and the rest of your life). This chapter will summarize the growing body of data on "what makes lawyers happy."¹⁰ Drawing on this important research, I will present a methodology for conducting a wellness-informed

5 See Young, *supra* note 2.

6 See e.g. Greater Good Science Center (University of California at Berkeley), "Self-Compassionate Letter" (last visited 23 October 2024), online: <https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/self_compassionate_letter>.

7 See Jerome M Organ et al, "Suffering in Silence: The Survey of Law Student Well-Being and the Reluctance of Law Students to Seek Help for Substance Use and Mental Health Concerns" (2016) 66 J Legal Educ 166.

8 See Nina Golden, "Could You Repeat the Question? How Media Distractions Detract from Learning and a Courteous Classroom Environment" (2017) 19 Atlantic LJ 58 at 59; see also Reynol Junco & Shelia R Cotten, "No A 4 U: The Relationship Between Multitasking and Academic Performance" (2012) 59 Computers & Educ 505.

9 See generally Peter C Brown, Henry L Roediger III & Mark A McDaniel, *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2014); Michael Hunter Schwartz, *Expert Learning for Law Students* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2008).

10 Lawrence Krieger & Kennon Sheldon, "What Makes Lawyers Happy? A Data-Driven Prescription to Redefine Professional Success" (2015) 83 Geo Wash L Rev 554.

job search, with the goal of helping you choose the opportunities that are most likely to support your wellbeing and professional success. Chapter 8 explores law students’ and lawyers’ ethical duty to maximize their own personal wellbeing to better serve clients and to fulfill the many important roles lawyers have in society. I conclude that an optimistic, self-aware legal profession has the potential to be a powerful force for good in the world.

How to Use This Book

Educating yourself on the science of success and happiness will give you a huge advantage in your legal life. But information is not enough. The biggest results come when you *experience* your own ability to change your state of being and your practical results. If you really want to benefit from this book, don’t just read it. Do the “Key Takeaways” and the experiential exercises in each chapter. Consider working through the book with like-minded classmates at your own school or in online communities of law students (Appendix B contains further guidance on how to use this book with a study group or a buddy). As with your law school journey as a whole, actively engaging with this material will make all the difference in the world.

Now, as I’ve said at the beginning of just about every class I’ve taught for the past 18 years: Let’s get started!

Key Takeaways

What do you want out of your law school journey—educationally, professionally, personally? (Note: there are no wrong answers.)

How would you like to improve your day-to-day experience at law school? What feelings or outcomes would you like to maintain or improve? What would you like to let go of?

What are you hoping to get out of this book?

The Wellbeing Advantage

Feel Good, Perform Better 11

Just Soldier On? 11

The “Joy Burst” Phenomenon 12

Hopeful Students Do Better Academically 14

The Question of Causation 15

The Paradoxical Benefits of Embracing Negative Emotion 16

Building Your Wellbeing Toolkit 17

Key Takeaways 17

Law school preparation books often stress the need for “grit and grind,” so it may seem counterintuitive to think about wellbeing as a powerful academic and professional advantage. If you’re like most law students, you’ve been trained from a young age to sacrifice your own personal preferences in favour of self-discipline and hard work. From our earliest days at elementary school, we “good students” internalized the message that success comes from suppressing our natural instincts to do what feels good (e.g., go outside on a sunny May morning) and work hard instead (e.g., pay attention to the math lesson). Like many of your peers, you may have bought into the idea that there is no gain without pain. However, decades of scientific evidence—thousands of studies on hundreds of thousands of people—have shown that wellbeing is in fact your most reliable path to success.¹ The cosmic joke turns out to be that “working happy” is far more effective than “working hard.”

You probably already understand that it’s worthwhile to invest in your wellbeing simply to avoid becoming a law school statistic. Physical or mental health crises can compromise or interrupt your law school experience, causing you to miss deadlines, defer exams, take a term off, or have to repeat a year.² Obviously, we would all prefer to prevent physical or mental breakdowns if possible, and this in itself is a good enough reason to practise the tools and techniques presented in this book and others like it.³ Research has shown that a large percentage of professional infractions by lawyers involve mental health issues,⁴ and I suspect the same is true of academic misconduct cases.⁵ Learning to take optimal care of your body, mind, and emotions—including seeking help whenever you need it—makes you far less vulnerable to the temptations of unethical conduct and far less likely to inadvertently sabotage your own success. However, the advantages of wellbeing go far beyond avoiding negative outcomes. Wellbeing is in fact a performance-enhancing academic tool that will help you maximize your potential as a law student.

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- 1 See Feifei Wang, “Study on Positive Psychology from 1999 to 2021: A Bibliometric Analysis” (2023) 14 Front Psychol 1101057.
 - 2 Note that taking a term or a year off can be very constructive. I know of several successful lawyers who took a break from their law school programs to address mental health issues and others who did all or part of their law degree part-time to accommodate physical illness or childcare responsibilities.
 - 3 See e.g. Shailini George, *The Law Student’s Guide to Doing Well and Being Well* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2021); Scott L Rogers, *The Mindful Law Student: A Mindfulness in Law Practice Guide* (London: Edward Elgar, 2022); Lawrence Krieger, *Enjoy Success & Drop the Stress in Law School and Law Practice: Applying the New Science for a Fulfilling Life and Career*, Kindle ed (2021); Kathryn Young, *How to Be (Sort of) Happy in Law School* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018).
 - 4 See e.g. Jennifer Moore et al, “Disciplinary Tribunal Cases Involving New Zealand Lawyers with Physical or Mental Impairment, 2009–2013” (2015) 22 Psychiatry, Psychol & L 1.
 - 5 Liat Korn & Nitza Davidovitch, “The Profile of Academic Offenders: Features of Students Who Admit to Academic Dishonesty” (2016) 22 Med Sci Monitor 3043.

Feel Good, Perform Better

It seems clear that maintaining a healthy body will help you succeed in law school, since it reduces your odds of getting sick, missing class, or underperforming on exams and assignments. But maintaining or increasing your mental wellbeing also has powerful performance benefits. In his excellent book, *The Happiness Advantage*, psychologist Shawn Achor summarizes the research on positivity and performance as follows:

Positive emotions flood our brains with dopamine and serotonin, chemicals that not only make us feel good but dial up the learning centres of our brains to higher levels. They help us organize new information, keep that information in the brain longer, and retrieve it faster later on. And they enable us to make and sustain more neural connections, which allows us to think more quickly and creatively [and] become more skilled at complex analysis and problem solving⁶ ...

[Research shows] that happiness leads to success in nearly every domain including work, health, friendship, sociability, creativity and energy.⁷

Since I am up against many years of messaging from teachers, parents, and peers who may have taught you that suffering leads to success, I propose to take you through the evidence in some detail and hopefully make my case that cultivating wellbeing may just be your secret superpower in law school. Let's consider a few case studies.

Just Soldier On?

In case you're wondering if the wellbeing advantage applies in high pressure, competitive environments, consider this: a recent study of over 900,000 soldiers in the US Army found that those who had the highest levels of "positive affect" (good feelings) were *four times* more likely to win performance awards than those who had the lowest levels.⁸ The study covered both awards for excellence in non-combat roles and awards for heroism in active combat. In other words, when placed in life-or-death situations, facing critical stress levels, soldiers who were generally happy people were able to reach peak performance when it counted most. The implication of this finding for law students and lawyers is clear: investing in your wellbeing throughout the year will pay dividends when you're faced with high stress "crunch" times. Another encouraging finding from this study is that the wellbeing advantage is not just for those who attain the highest levels of

6 Shawn Achor, *The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2010) at 44.

7 *Ibid* at 21.

8 Paul B Lester et al, "Happy Soldiers Are Highest Performers" (2021) 23 J Happiness Stud 1099.

thriving. In fact, the largest increase in performance awards occurred between the low and moderate positive affect group. In other words, you don't need to become a master of enlightenment to capitalize on the proven benefits of positivity. Even students who have significant mental health concerns can improve their academic performance by reaching out for help to manage or ameliorate their symptoms. Moreover, for many people, small, temporary improvements in mood can make a difference in performance.

The “Joy Burst” Phenomenon

As law students and lawyers, we are regularly called upon to “diagnose” legal problems. On an exam or in your legal practice, you will be presented with a messy factual story and will need to identify the applicable legal issues and the appropriate remedy. Doctors perform a similar function when they sift through a description of symptoms to identify a patient's condition and the appropriate treatment. As in legal research and reasoning, one of the most common errors in medical diagnosis is “anchoring,” or getting stuck on an initial mistaken impression. In this scenario, rather than correcting course when further information proves the first hypothesis wrong, we are “anchored” to the initial conclusion. In one experiment, psychologists administered a standard diagnostic test to two groups of doctors; one group was given a small gift of candy (but not allowed to eat it as the researchers did not want blood sugar to be a factor) while the other group received nothing. The physicians who got candy experienced a small lift in mood—a little joy burst—while the second group remained in their pre-existing mood. The happier doctors were able to come to a diagnosis *nearly twice as fast* as their less happy counterparts and they “showed about two and a half times less anchoring.”⁹

This kind of finding has been replicated in a variety of contexts. One study, for example, showed that students who were asked to think about the happiest day of their lives before taking a standardized math test did better than their classmates.¹⁰ Another showed that students who are feeling positive emotions in any given week are more engaged in their learning and thus perform better academically.¹¹ In yet another study, people who had read appreciative notes showed better problem-solving abilities than the control group. In this case, researchers asked two groups of volunteers to attempt to solve a notoriously difficult visual-spatial problem known as the Duncker Candle Problem. One group had been asked to request friends, family, and co-workers to submit emails to the researchers describing episodes during which they had seen the participants at their very best. The researchers then compiled these “best-self activating” notes, and the participants

9 Achor, *supra* note 6 at 47.

10 T Bryan & J Bryan, “Positive Mood and Math Performance” (1991) 24 J Learn Disabil 490.

11 Alfredo Rodríguez-Muñoz et al, “Positive Emotions, Engagement, and Objective Academic Performance: A Weekly Diary Study” (2021) 92 Learn & Individ Diff 102087.

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read them immediately before attempting the problem. The other group received no such notes. Only 19 percent of the control group was able to solve the problem, while *more than half* of those who had experienced the emotional uplift of praise and acknowledgment from their close connections succeeded. Moreover, the “best-self activated” group showed lower levels of physiological stress and better immune function at the end of the test.¹²

All of this is excellent news for law students. For many of you, relatively quick and easy interventions can improve your mood, and thus your performance.¹³ Think about this the next time you’re about to give a presentation, write an exam, or start a particularly difficult reading. Rather than taking your last five minutes to re-read a case for the fifteenth time, consider doing something like dancing to your favourite upbeat song, hugging your cat, calling your best friend for a quick pep talk, or watching a video on YouTube that always makes you laugh. Similarly, if you are about to start law school, go through the on-campus interview process, or enter your final exam period, consider reaching out to trusted friends and family and asking them to write you an email or a letter describing one or more episodes when they have seen you at your best. Keep these letters and read them frequently.

Try It

Spend a few minutes brainstorming efficient and effective ways to lift your mood during a typical law school day. See if you can come up with at least five “joy burst” activities that you could use on a regular basis. (For now, try to think of options other than stimulants like caffeine and sugar.)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Now implement one or more of these techniques over the next few days and come back to this page to make a note of your results. Experimenting with the techniques described in this book will help you develop lasting skills and habits to maximize your wellbeing advantage.

(Continued on next page.)

12 Daniel M Cable, “How Best-Self Activation Influences Emotions, Physiology and Employment Relationships” (2015) SSRN Elec J.

13 Students who are experiencing serious anxiety or depression will of course require more intensive support, but these “joy burst” and “best-self activating” techniques may be helpful adjuncts to professional counselling or medical interventions. Ask your healthcare provider.

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Joy burst results:

Hopeful Students Do Better Academically

Years of research has shown that students with high levels of hope—defined as the motivation to achieve your goals coupled with the belief that there are multiple pathways to get there—perform better academically than their less hopeful peers. A three-year study of undergraduate students in the United Kingdom, for example, concluded that “hope uniquely predicts objective academic achievement above intelligence, personality, and previous academic achievement.”¹⁴ Students with high levels of hope are less likely to commit academic misconduct, “have better grades, [and] are more likely to graduate, experience increased wellbeing, and lower psychological distress.”¹⁵ Similarly, decades of groundbreaking research by psychologist Carol Dweck and her colleagues have shown that students with a “growth mindset”—those who believe they can increase their abilities with concerted effort—have higher grades¹⁶ and show more improvement in their GPA over time than those with a “fixed mindset” (those who believe their abilities are set in stone).¹⁷

Hope is a particularly valuable asset in law school—especially 1L—as students are confronted with voluminous material; rigorous new ways of thinking, researching, and writing; and demanding new forms of evaluation (such as the 100 percent final exam). In a pivotal study by Allison Martin and Kevin Rand, researchers asked incoming law students for information about their undergraduate GPAs, LSAT scores, and demographic factors; they then administered a series of standardized psychological tests that measure levels of hope, optimism, and life satisfaction. With the students’ consent, the researchers then obtained grade

14 Liz Day et al, “Hope Uniquely Predicts Objective Academic Achievement Above Intelligence, Personality, and Previous Academic Achievement” (2010) 44:4 J Res in Personality 550.

15 Tanya Coetzee et al, “Hope Moderates the Relationship Between Students’ Sense of Belonging and Academic Misconduct” (2020) 18 Int’l J Ed Integrity 28.

16 Sarah D Sparks, “‘Growth Mindset’ Linked to Higher Test Scores, Student Well-Being in Global Study” (9 April 2021), online: <<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/growth-mindset-linked-to-higher-test-scores-student-well-being-in-global-study/2021/04>>.

17 Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006).

information at the end of the first term. The study showed that hope was a significant predictor of academic success in the first term of 1L. In fact, hope was more strongly correlated with GPA than the students' LSAT score. Luckily, as we'll see in Chapter 4, it is possible to deliberately cultivate a more hopeful mindset to capitalize on this important dimension of the wellbeing advantage.

The Question of Causation

We've all had the experience of getting a good grade or acing a task at work and feeling great about it, so it's natural to question whether happiness leads to success or whether the reverse is true—maybe successful people are just happier. However, research has shown that improvements in happiness and wellbeing often *precede* academic and professional success. Feeling good causes physiological changes in your brain that make it easier to solve problems, retain information, and persevere with difficult tasks. Conversely, research on lawyer wellbeing in the United States, Canada, and Australia has shown that there are many lawyers who have objectively succeeded in law school; landed high-paying, prestigious jobs; and are nevertheless unhappy or even unwell. So, it's just not a good idea to postpone your health and happiness until you've achieved academic or professional success. Instead, view your wellbeing as fuel to bring about your success *and* a means to enjoy your life and preserve your physical and mental health as you make your way toward your goals.

A Student Perspective

I started law school with one goal in mind: to achieve high grades. I believed that my future depended on it, so I prioritized studying over all other aspects of my life. Inadvertently, I distanced myself from family and friends to avoid feeling guilty about any time not spent studying. When mid-term grades were released, to my surprise, I was pleased to find nearly straight As. However, it became apparent that maintaining this pace, amidst exhaustion and a sense of detachment, was not sustainable. I spoke to Professor Lynda Collins about my feelings, and she challenged me to prioritize my happiness. I was hesitant to sacrifice my precious study time to spend time with family and friends. Nevertheless, I followed her advice. I formed a schedule that carved out time for activities that brought me joy. I maintained accountability by journaling daily happy moments.

At the end of my first year, I was thrilled to see that my final grades were even better than my mid-term grades. This proved the importance of including self-care and happiness in my daily routines instead of relegating them to an afterthought. I maintained my new mindset through the rest of my law school journey. I graduated in the top 4 percent of my class, and I believe my grades not only reflect my academic efforts but, more importantly, my commitment to self-care and happiness.

—Nika Moslehi

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The Paradoxical Benefits of Embracing Negative Emotion

With all this evidence of the performance benefits of positive emotion, you may be concluding that part of your job as a law student is to feel good all the time. This would be a mistake for at least three reasons. First, difficult emotions can be highly valuable messengers, conveying important information that requires our attention. For example, overwork, self-criticism, and catastrophic thinking feel bad because they *are* bad in the sense that they are suboptimal from the perspective of your wellbeing and performance. By contrast, taking care of your basic human needs for sleep, exercise, and love will always feel good and lead to better performance because we are hardwired to thrive under these conditions. By attending to all our emotions—the good, bad, and ugly—we can learn to make optimal choices.¹⁸

Second, embracing uncomfortable emotions is a necessary ingredient to your happiness and wellbeing. As psychologist and happiness expert Tal Ben-Shahar has explained, “paradoxically, when we do not allow ourselves to experience painful emotions, we limit our capacity for happiness. All our feelings flow along the same emotional pipeline, so when we block painful emotions, we are also indirectly blocking pleasurable ones.”¹⁹

Third, when you embrace painful emotions—without feeding them through repetitive mental rumination—they tend to resolve organically. To paraphrase Carl Jung, one of the founders of psychoanalysis, “what you resist persists.”²⁰ So the goal is not to get rid of the normal emotions you may experience in law school—fear, jealousy, frustration, and so on—but rather to learn to be with them with as little judgment and as much kindness as possible. As always, if you are unable to cope with your emotions, or if they do not improve as you implement the wellbeing skills and knowledge you are gaining, reach out for professional help. You’ll be glad you did.

Ultimately, the key to owning the wellbeing advantage is to consciously tend to your own wellbeing—to set yourself up for success and give yourself every

18 One early study even suggested that pessimism can be an academic advantage for law students. Although more recent research questions this finding, it is certainly true that the capacity for critical thinking and a healthy skepticism are important legal skills. See Jason M Satterfield, John Monahan & Martin EP Seligman, “Law School Performance Predicted by Explanatory Style” (1997) 15 Behav Sci & L 95; Emily Zimmerman & Casey LaDuke, “Every Silver Lining Has a Cloud: Defensive Pessimism in Legal Education” (2017) 66 Catholic U L Rev 823.

19 Tal Ben-Shahar, *The Pursuit of Perfect: How to Stop Chasing Perfection and Start Living a Richer, Happier Life* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2009) at xvii.

20 Leon F Seltzer, “You Only Get More of What You Resist—Why?” (15 June 2016), online: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/evolution-of-the-self/201606/you-only-get-more-of-what-you-resist-why>>.

opportunity to feel good, stay healthy, and enjoy your law school experience. Having put that foundation in place, make sure you meet your difficult emotions with understanding, self-compassion, and a little help from your friends.

Building Your Wellbeing Toolkit

The rest of this book will equip you with the knowledge you need to make effective physical, mental, and academic choices to maximize your wellbeing advantage. Remember that developing your wellbeing is an active and ongoing process, so to get the most out of this material you will need to move from *knowing* to *doing*. As Shawn Achor puts it, the wellbeing advantage “is about learning how to cultivate the mindset and behaviours that have been empirically proven to fuel greater success and fulfillment. *It is a work ethic.*”²¹

Key Takeaways

What are three things you learned from this chapter?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How could you implement this knowledge in your day-to-day life at law school?

²¹ Achor, *supra* note 6 at 24 (emphasis added).

