Keynote: Strategies for Transforming Stress Into Resilience
The Psychology of Coping with Change

Presented by Dr. Larry Richard,
Founder & Principal Consultant, LawyerBrain LLC

Introduction

“Change”
We don't like change

Change has serious psychological consequences

Psychological Effects of Change

• Mood disturbances & increased negative emotions (anxiety, depression, fear, irritability, etc.)
• Increased distractibility
• Increase in errors of omission
• Pushes people to behave at the lesser end of their normal spectrum of behavior
• Passivity
• Disconnection
Change has an even stronger adverse impact on lawyers. WHY?

High Skepticism (Low Optimism)

Lawyers  General Public

Negativity

- Negativity is built into the job description
  ✓ “What’s wrong?”
  ✓ “What could go wrong in the future?”
  ✓ “Who’s at fault?” “Who made a mistake?”
  ✓ “What exceptions are there to the proposition?”
Negativity

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  - “Who’s at fault? Who made a mistake?”
  - “What exceptions are there to the proposition?”

You can’t control change.
But you can control your response to change

And that makes all the difference.
Things You Can Do To Build Psychological Resilience

Principle #1: Increase Positivity (the mega-principle)

The most significant breakthrough in psychology in the past 100 years . . .
Thoughts → Feelings → Behavior

If you change your thoughts . . .

You change your feelings
Positive Emotions

• Strategy: Reduce negative emotions. Increase positive emotions.
• Offsets lawyer negativity
• 3:1 (and 5:1)
• Dosage effect
• Negative is essential—it’s just that we need to offset it with even more positive

Three Good Things

• Same time each night
• Write down 3 good things
• Need not be things you caused to happen
• 60 seconds to savor
• Repeat, but with new items the next day
• Do for at least two weeks... or longer

Principle #2:
Focus on Strengths
Improving Speed-Reading

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U. Of Nebraska (1955)  
Nebraska School Study Council  
Study of 6000 tenth-graders  
Method used made no difference  
Best students had best improvement!!!

Payoffs for Focusing on Strengths

- Higher levels of employee engagement
- Reduces “active disengagement” from 21% to < 1% ! ! !
- Lower turnover, greater longevity
- Consistent increases in productivity & profitability
Research on Using Strengths
1. Just knowing your strengths matters
2. Aligning one’s strengths with the task that one does at work—especially one’s greatest strengths—produces high levels of work satisfaction
3. Leveraging strengths—getting better at the stuff you already do well—produces high levels of work satisfaction and a sense of mastery
4. Using your strengths in a new way on a regular basis provides increased levels of work satisfaction and a reduction in depressive thinking

Principle #3: Foster Social Connection

“Presence”: Attention Matters
The Champion

The Challenger

Colgate #1
Increase Social Connection

- Dr. Shelly Gable:
- How you respond to the good news of others is the single best predictor of an effective long-term relationship – “Presence” is the key
- “Will you be there for me when things go right?”
- Constructive vs. Destructive
- Active vs. Passive
- 4 response styles to good news—only one of them builds the relationship

Active-Constructive Responding:
It’s all about “Presence”
(Shelly Gable)

“I just won my first case!”

Active
- Enthusiastic, authentic support (“the joy multiplier”)
- Quashing the event (“They are the parade and you are the rain.”)

Passive
- Quiet, understated support (“the conversation killer”)
- Ignoring the event or taking over the conversation (“the conversation hijacker”)

Principle #4:
Foster This Emotion
Here’s something that can . . .

- Reduce physical symptoms (fewer colds, headaches) (plus lower levels of biomarkers for inflammation)
- Produce greater life satisfaction
- Make people more optimistic about the coming week
- Create higher states of alertness, attentiveness, determination and energy, and reports of sustained better moods
- Result in fewer absences
- Cause people to be more helpful to others
- Lead people to report fewer hassles in their lives
- Foster better sleep quality
- Create an increased feeling of being connected to others
- Generate higher productivity

Power of Words Video

Words matter
Thank You

Takeaway Tips: 1
• The practice of law encourages problem-spotting and other forms of negative thinking
• A steady diet of this can have harmful psychological effects
• In a time of great change, the negative mindset can amplify some of the deleterious effects of change
• Luckily, recent scientific breakthroughs have resulted in a number of simple yet powerful steps that lawyers can take to counteract these effects

Takeaway Tips: 2
1. Your mindset is powerful. Changing how you think can change how you feel and behave.
2. The core principle: Bad is stronger than Good. Consequently, your best strategy is to consciously “hunt for the good stuff” in order to balance out and counteract any negativity.
3. Do the “3 Good Things” activity every day at the same time.
4. Go to www.positivityratio.com and check your positivity ratio daily. Strive to improve your weekly average to better than 3:1.
Takeaway Tips: 3
5. Use Active-Constructive Listening regularly with the significant people in your life.
6. When you run into criticism, rejection, or other adverse events, listen to your “mind chatter” and program it towards short duration, limited scope, and think of what you can control going forward.
7. In your work, routinely ask yourself what impact and meaning your actions are having. Do the same when you give work to others.

Takeaway Tips: 4
8. Focus not just on fixing deficiencies, but also on using your strengths—try to do work that plays to your strengths; try to get better at what you already do well; and try to use your strengths in new ways regularly.
9. Exercise gratitude—At least twice a week, make a list of things you are grateful for. When someone does something helpful that they didn’t have to do, thank them in a sincere way. Relax more about things you may think you’re “entitled” to.
10. Be a role model

Recommended Books
- The Resilience Factor by Karen Reivich & Andre Shatte. Describes 7 steps, based on cognitive psychology, that can enable an individual to increase his/her Resilience. The basis for the *mental toughness* component of the U.S. Army program I mentioned.
- Flourish by Martin Seligman. His most recent book. A good introduction to positive psychology.
- Learned Optimism by Martin Seligman. One of his earlier books, but a very important one. Describes his original model of *optimism* or *explanatory style*, and how it can be learned.
- Positive Leadership by Kim Cameron. A synopsis of the empirical research in positive psychology as applied to organizations, as of 2008.
Recommended Books, cont’d

- **Positivity** by Barbara Frederickson. Describes her original research on the "positivity" model and why we need a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative communication.
- **StrengthsFinder 2.0** by Tom Rath. Tom is a psychologist with the Gallup Organization. This book describes the 34 strengths that they measure. If you purchase the hardbound version of the book, it comes with one free coupon to take the StrengthsFinder test online. Find out your top 5 strengths.
- **The Happiness Advantage** by Shawn Achor. A very readable summary of the latest principles of positive psychology.
- **Drive** by Daniel Pink. A good summary of the latest research on motivation, including why "if-then rewards" and "incentivizing" are not great ways to motivate knowledge workers.

Contact Info
Larry Richard, J.D., Ph.D.
LawyerBrain LLC
303 W. Lancaster Ave., #332
Wayne, PA 19087 USA
T: 610.688.7400 | M: 610.304.2966
E: drlarryrichard@lawyerbrain.com
W: www.lawyerbrain.com
B: www.lawyerbrainblog.com

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- Repairing dysfunctional behavior
- Selecting talent
- Building teamwork