7 Tips to Reduce Lawyer Stress Levels

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Lawyer stress levels are through the roof. Over two-thirds of lawyers endure mental health issues, an estimated 93% of junior lawyers feel stressed at work, while 40% say they've become more stressed since the onset of the pandemic. Unfortunately, lawyer burnout is more prevalent than ever.

This is perhaps unsurprising. Lawyers have a reputation for working long hours and handling important work. In addition to this, lawyers rarely (if ever) have a let-off—their clients often expect them to perform at their best all the time.

This blog will explore lawyer stress levels, explaining why being a lawyer is stressful, what stress is, and how it can manifest in the workplace. We'll also offer seven tips to reduce lawyer stress levels.

Is it stressful being a lawyer?

Being a lawyer can be incredibly stressful, but lawyer stress levels vary greatly across practice areas. Corporate lawyers working in biglaw will likely be more stressed than estate planning attorneys in a small firm.

What is stress?

Oxford Languages defines stress as "a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances." Everyone has a different stress tolerance, and it affects us all differently. Unfortunately, nobody is immune from stress. Legal professionals will certainly feel the weight of lawyer stress levels.

Attorneys might feel stressed or anxious in the workplace for various reasons. Perhaps their caseload is increasing at an alarming rate, a particular case isn't going well, or they might struggle to work with colleagues and clients.

It's also worth mentioning that attorneys might feel stressed due to a lack of work-life balance or troubles outside their office's four walls. When people are stressed in the workplace, they can express this in a number of ways (whether voluntarily or involuntarily).

For example, they might become visibly angry and short with colleagues. Others may retreat into themselves and be quieter than usual, appearing despondent. Or, some people turn to unhealthy crutches, such as excessive alcohol or tobacco consumption.

Why do lawyers have so much stress?

Lawyers have a huge amount of responsibility on their shoulders as well as an ever-increasing workload. Clients rely on their lawyers to save them from prosecution, get complex deals over the line, or protect their most valuable assets. Great responsibility can bring great stress.

7 tips to reduce lawyer stress levels in the workplace

Lawyers shouldn't simply accept stress as part and parcel of the job. Instead, lawyers can work to recognize the symptoms, be wary of the effects, and actively put effort into having healthy responses to stressors.

Here's how you can do this effectively.

1. Accept that you're not alone

Lawyer stress levels are high across the board. Generally, stress in the firm and at court is more common than you might think. Even the most intelligent and successful lawyers feel stressed from time to time. Knowing this, don't feel like you're unfit for the profession if you struggle with stress.

It's also important to speak openly about how you're feeling. If you feel comfortable opening up to colleagues, this can be a great way to relieve some of the mental burden. Your colleagues know the pressure you're under and the conditions in which you work. Therefore, they'll be able to empathize with your situation. They might even be able to take some of your workload off your hands.

Alternatively, if you don't feel like you can open up to colleagues, chat to friends and family instead. They might not know what you're dealing with in the workplace, but sometimes, hearing an outsider's perspective is just what you need. They'll also be able to remind you that no matter what's happening at work, there's a life outside the office.

2. Find a workplace that supports you

There's no point in working for a firm whose values don't match your own. You probably won't be able to change the firm single-handedly. The solution is to change your own values instead. Except, this is unwise. You shouldn't have to change who you are to be a great lawyer.

Ultimately, it's important to know yourself. Getting clear on your wants, needs, and stress tolerance will help you adapt and cope in a holistic manner. Think about when you're most stressed. Is it when you're overburdened? When someone's rude to you? How about when facing a seemingly impossible task?

Knowing your own stress triggers and tolerance will help you find a practice area and firm you feel empowered to work at. However, you should also ask detailed questions during the interview process. Dig into what the firm expects from its employees and read as many Glassdoor reviews as you can.

If you own your firm, you should keep a close eye over how your employees feel. Remember, while you might not be stressed, more junior employees could be. Don't assume whether or not people are stressed. Some individuals are great at hiding it. Take regular surveys (make them anonymous if people seem uncomfortable with the idea) and check in with your team to see how they feel. If they seem overly stressed, ask them what needs to change.

Learn more about fostering a positive workplace in our post, *Rejecting Toxic Law Firm Culture: How to Create a Better Culture for Your Firm*.

3. Create law firm processes

Lawyers have 1,001 things on their plate at any time. In fact, the vast majority of lawyers who are stressed feel that way because they're overburdened. On the face of it, this isn't great. Not one bit. Only, there's a relatively simple fix—creating law firm processes.

Processes keep everyone throughout a firm united. Attorneys know what they need to do—and how to do it. Better yet, once firms have defined processes in place, they can implement technology to automate as much as possible (more on this below). Automation, when integrated thoughtfully, undoubtedly supports lowering lawyer stress levels.

As W. Edwards Deming, the industrialist and management consultant, said, "If you can't describe what you're doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing"

4. Utilize legal technology

Creating solid law firm processes is just the first step. To maximize efficiency and minimize lawyer stress levels, firms need to implement technology. Legal technology can aid and automate almost every aspect of a lawyer's job.

Take the billing process, for example.

Rather than attorneys haphazardly trying to account for every billable minute in a month (a process that's slow, cumbersome, and fraught with errors), lawyers can instead use automatic time-tracking tools, like Clio. This allows lawyers to instantly identify how long they spend working for each client, making the billing process quicker, easier, and more accurate.

5. Offer alternative fee arrangements

Lawyers need to spend as much time as possible on activities that tangibly move the needle for their clients and firm: Interviewing witnesses, devising strategies with clients, poring over complex documents, and so on.

Yet all too often, they're dragged into fee disputes. For example, a client might not be able to pay their legal fees, meaning their lawyer has to act as the go-between. Lawyers aren't debt collectors or financial advisors. Needless to say, these discussions can be a never-ending distraction.

The solution? Offer alternative fee arrangements.

Consider that according to the *2021 Legal Trends Report*, 78% of consumers say lawyers should adopt pricing and payment models to make legal services more affordable. Firms that offer alternative fee arrangements can meet clients in the middle, providing services they need at a cost they can bear. Best of all, lawyers will no longer be dragged into fee discussions that only add to their existing lawyer stress levels.

6. Hire a paralegal to help with your workload

Hiring a paralegal, or even a freelance paralegal, can help take some of the research and other administrative work off of lawyers' plates.

This is a lifeline for busy lawyers. Small firms might feel like lawyers should handle everything themselves to keep their operations as lean and agile as possible. However, this would be a mistake. After all, the more time lawyers spend on work that could be

completed by a cheaper and less-skilled paralegal, the less time they can spend on client work.

7. Find a legal mentor

Last but not least, lawyers should consider finding themselves a legal mentor. This should be someone you can trust to discuss their goals, cases, and problems with. As the adage goes, “A problem shared is a problem halved”. Legal mentors have been there and done it. They empathize with what their mentees are going through, and might’ve even been through the same challenges themselves.

But empathy alone isn’t enough. Legal mentors can also offer some much-needed tips and advice on how you can reduce your lawyer stress levels. For example, outlining how to put up boundaries in the workplace, balance personal life with work life, delegate to junior colleagues, and so on.

Final notes on lawyer stress levels

Lawyers need to recognize that stress sometimes comes with the territory. However, that doesn’t mean they should simply accept it—or that there’s nothing they can do to improve their personal wellness.

Recognize when lawyer stress levels are high. If you’re feeling the pressure, try to pinpoint what’s making you feel that way. Express how you feel with others and recognize that you’re not alone. Ensure you work at a firm that shares your core values and beliefs—this will go a long way to keeping lawyer stress levels in check. Build on this by creating strong law firm processes which incorporate the latest legal technology. Offer clients alternative fee arrangements, hire paralegals, and find a mentor who you can speak to whenever you feel stressed.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio’s AI brings the context together

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