



Share Your Well-Being Boosting Passion

Well-Being Week in Law 2024 | Friday, May 10

How legal professionals invest their non-work time and energy can have a big impact on their mental health and work engagement. But many feel so busy and tired from work, that their non-work activities dwindle. The aim of this program is to provide inspiration, guidance, and resources to try out new, well-being-boosting activities outside work.

Session leaders will:

- Share activities they do to disconnect from work, revitalize their energy, stave off burnout, and feed their soul.
- Explain how they fit their passion into their busy lives.
- Provide tips and resources for trying out the activity.

Linking Nonwork Passions to Well-Being

Nearly all the *Share Your Passion* sessions involve some form of creativity. Creativity supports mental health and fuller, happier lives and can help stressed-out lawyers relax, recover from stress, and rejuvenate.

Everyday Creativity

The positive effects of creativity aren't tied to specific activities or to any special talent. It's the [creative process](#) that appears to be most important for our well-being and positive psychological development (Silvia et al., 2014). For example, a [2018 study](#) found that people who identified themselves as "Makers" tended to be happier and more likely to have indicators of psychological health, such as less rumination and excessive self-focus (Collier & Wayment, 2018). This study involved everyday creativity like domestic activities (e.g., baking, cooking, gardening, scrapbooking) and arts and crafts (photography, quilting, drawing, painting, sewing, jewelry-making, knitting, crochet, ceramics, computer graphics).

Pathways Between Creativity & Well-Being

Creativity connects to well-being through multiple pathways:

- Sparks positive emotions.
- Generates the mental state of flow.
- Connects us with other people and aids a sense of belonging.
- Enables self-expression.
- Promotes a sense of meaning.
- Helps us relax and detach from work.
- Provides positive challenge & experiences of mastery and accomplishment.
- Builds self-awareness.

SESSION #2: WRITING

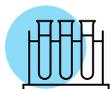


DESCRIPTION

30 Minutes: Friday, May 10, 12:00 pm ET-12:30 pm ET

Speaker: Kelli Dunaway

Kelli will share her passion for novel writing, how she fits it into her busy life, and tips and tools she has learned during her journey developing as an author. She also will talk about her journaling practice and facilitate a brief writing activity.



SCIENCE

Link Between Writing Stories & Well-Being

Telling stories through novels or shorter works has the potential to cultivate well-being through multiple pathways—including, for example, flow, mastery, purpose, belonging, and self-expression.

Writing and reading literature also provides a safe, imaginary world in which to experiment with different realities or practice life skills. Through literature, we may experience powerful negative feelings but in a manageable way through an aesthetic distance (Pawelski & Moores, 2013). This experience may make us better prepared for our own inevitable hardships or may inspire change. Reading and writing literature that inspires compassion also can help the brain become more efficient at the sophisticated processes involved in complex human emotions such as empathy and compassion (Kidd & Castano, 2013; Pawelski & Moores, 2013).

Writing also can have a dark side that undercuts well-being. For example, the dangers of “[obsessive passion](#)” lurk for many writers. This [occurs for writers](#) when they focus primarily on external rewards and recognition (Stulberg, 2019). They write so they can brag about published stories and best-seller status. By contrast, when writers are motivated by “harmonious passionate,” they write because they love the craft.

Harmonious passion is more strongly related to health and happiness. It also relates to flexibility that allows writers to detach from their writing and fully engage in enjoy other parts of their lives. Most passionate people are motivated by *both* external recognition and love for the activity. But when an external focus becomes dominate, well-being and a balanced lifestyle are likely to decline. The upshot is that, when engaging in our passions, we should [strive for harmonious passion](#) while minimizing obsessive passion (Morales, 2020).

Link Between Journaling & Well-Being

Writing also can be used specifically as a mental health tool. Writing down what we’re thinking can help us sort out our experience and organize and verbalize our thoughts. Much research has

found that it can result in many positive outcomes, including positive effects on mood, mental health, and personal and professional development.

Why does writing help? It can, for example, make us more self-aware, help us work out difficult emotions, aid our detection of unhealthy patterns in our thoughts and behaviors, enable us to clarify our goals and values to take greater control over our lives, put things in perspective, and shift our mindsets (Ackerman, 2022; Newman, 2016, 2020).

A major reason that reflective writing aids well-being is that it aids self-distancing (taking a step back) and meaning making (asking why; Partk et al., 2010). Both contribute to effective emotion regulation (White et al. 2015).

If you try out a writing practice, try not to overly focus on the technical aspects of writing, which can distract you from the flow of thoughts. Just write freely. If you're reflecting on a distressing experience, aim to construct a meaningful narrative that helps explain what happened. Try to work in causation words ("This might have happened because ..."; Partk et al., 2010).

If you're interested in trying out a writing practice, see this [short article](#) that provides some of the supporting science and gives some writing tips. The Greater Good Science Center (a nonprofit at University of California-Berkeley) provides a [free worksheet](#) for engaging in an expressive writing exercise specifically to work through an emotional challenge.



TIPS & RESOURCES

Books:

- Stephen King's *On Writing*
- Liz Gilbert's *Big Magic*
- Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*
- Robert Olen Butler's *From Where You Dream*

Websites:

- Writer's Digest, <https://www.writersdigest.com/>, for newsletters, advice, contests, inspiration, and so much more!
- Query Tracker, <https://querytracker.net/>, for keeping track of agents and submissions.

Tools:

- Get a writing coach! (I will happily refer mine if you reach out)
- n.o.w. tone therapy, <https://nowbysolu.com/>, for going into the zone.



KELLI DUNAWAY

Kelli Dunaway is a coach, teacher, activist, and writer whose *raison d'être* is helping people realize their potential. Kelli designs and delivers coaching and training that empowers people to define the leader they aspire to be and pursue its achievement with intentionality and purpose.

As coach, Kelli uses humor, instinct, and powerful questions to support her clients in imagining and executing practices and habits that help them achieve their professional and personal leadership goals. As consultant, Kelli works with law firms and organizations to define what leadership looks like and design training and coaching programs and policies to meet these goals.

As Councilwoman, Kelli imagines policy and works with constituents, County departments, the County Counselor's office, industry experts and the Executive's team to create laws to the equitable benefit of St. Louis County and the environment.

As woman, Kelli is mom to Bella and Liam, historical novelist, magick enthusiast and lover of happy hour and brunch.

Kelli is the Founder and CEO of Aspire, an elected Councilwoman in St. Louis County, Missouri, an ICF-certified coach, and a member of the California Bar. She earned her J.D. from UCLA and her B.A. in History from Southern Illinois University.

References

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MATERIALS NOTE

These materials were prepared for Well-Being Week in Law 2024, an event of the Institution for Well-Being in Law. The science blurbs were prepared by Dr. Anne M. Brafford, JD, MAPP, PhD. The session leaders contributed to the Tips & Resources for their sessions. Others are welcome to use these materials with proper attribution.



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