



Lawyers Are More Than Talking Heads

*Whenever I ignored my feelings and relied simply on logic,
I tended to be ineffective, or to blunder*

By Dennis Coyne

The evening rush hour began in a typical way, with a sprint through a crowded intersection toward a waiting commuter bus. I was carrying a briefcase filled with pleadings and court exhibits. An important hearing before the Minnesota Supreme Court was only a week away. I was focused on preparing my argument, anticipating what the court would say, and what the other lawyers would argue.

Before reaching the other side of the street, my knee collapsed. I stumbled. I was in a lot of pain and my leg would no longer support me. Somehow or other, I managed to get to the other side of the street. With the help of bystanders, I was able to get onto a bus. I soon found myself in an emergency room, being told that I would need surgery to repair torn cartilage in my knee. I was given a pair of crutches and sent home.

Once at home, I began to practice with my crutches. Unfortunately, I didn't master the use of crutches soon enough. That evening, I fell in the bathroom and split my head open on the side of the tub. As I lay there on the cold tile floor, I doubted that I'd ever be able to make a cogent argument to the Court. All I could imagine was standing with my crutches in the court room, my face black and blue, looking as though I had just barely survived a bar room brawl.

Centering Techniques Saw Me Through

A few days later, I found myself in the court room, seated a few strides from the podium. I knew to speak when the light was green and to conclude my argument when the light was red. I only had a few minutes of final preparation before the justices entered the court room and took their places. As I sat there, I turned my attention to a centering practice that I had integrated into my life for moments like this.

I focused on taking deep breathes. As I did so, I experienced a sense of relaxation and calm. I released tension in my forehead and jaw. I softened my eyes and opened my peripheral vision. I noted some tension in my neck, shoulders and pelvis, and I released it. I placed my feet squarely on the floor, straightened my back, and sat upright in the chair. I noticed my shoulders were up and forward, so I brought them down and back.

Feeling calm and present, I began paying attention to what was happening in the court room. I was confident that I could address the concerns of the court and connect with each of the judges. As it turns out, I did just that when it came my turn to address the court.

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After the arguments, many of us gathered in the hallway outside the court room. I appreciated the kind words of those who complimented me on my performance that day. What startled me, though, were the people who pressed me to explain how I had achieved extraordinary results even though I had entered the court room bruised and hobbled.

I explained that I had been centered, calm and present as I stood at the podium. I was able to connect with the judges and their concerns. I could dialogue with them, rather than talk at them. In the courtroom, I was a whole person (mind, body and spirit), not just a talking head.
We Are More Than Talking Heads

Years earlier, I had questioned the Cartesian split of mind from body. Of course, my training as a lawyer had taught me to prize analysis and argument. Yet whenever I ignored my feelings and relied simply on logic, I tended to be ineffective, or to blunder.

Eventually, I chose to no longer ignore the wisdom of the body. I came to realize that I could take effective action when I was able to integrate mind, body and spirit. That integration came through certain practices—a sitting practice (meditation), and movement practices (the 31 jo kata from Aikido, and cycling). In sum, I've been a champion of sound mind-sound body for years. During this time, Richard Strozzi-Heckler has been my teacher.

Many other members of our profession are champions of sound mind-sound body. Some are contributors to this issue of *The Complete Lawyer*. Others include:

- A partner and well-respected litigator at a major law firm who invited the lawyers and support staff to join him in an ongoing sitting practice at the law firm, and they did.
- A highly effective trial court judge who relies on his yoga practice to sustain him in his work.
- A judge who established an Aikido dojo where he teaches, applying the principles of Aikido to the everyday lives of the students who gather there.
- An attorney and member of the senior management team at a major corporation who leaves work early to attend yoga classes
- A senior prosecutor who established a yoga studio; when he's not in the court room, he's teaching there.
- A lawyer and member of a law school faculty who became certified as a massage therapist: today, he works as a massage therapist and mediates labor disputes.
- Lawyers who gather regularly as a part of their meditation practice and who also sponsor silent meditation retreats for lawyers, for which CLE credit is given.

These are only some of countless examples of lawyers and judges who are engaged in practices that integrate mind, body and spirit. I encourage you to be engaged in conversation with these people and to join them in such practices. In the end, you will be better able to live a satisfying life, take effective action, and achieve results for your clients.

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As you explore the wisdom of the body, and integrate mind, body and spirit, I hope that the words of Anna Swir will inspire you.

I Talk To My Body

My body, you are an animal
whose appropriate behavior
is concentration and discipline.

An effort
of an athlete,
of a saint, and of a yogi.

Well trained
you may become for me
a gate
through which I will leave myself
and a gate
through which I will enter myself.
A plumb line to the center of the earth
and a cosmic ship to Jupiter.

My body, you are an animal
for whom ambition
is right.

Splendid possibilities
are open to us.

(Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan)



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