



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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It's A Beautiful Day, Don't Let It Get Away

I almost died on December 24, 2003. And it was because I ignored my health for the sake of this profession. I was working as a young associate at a Big Law firm in Chicago, and the pressure was on with long days at work. I would often miss scheduling my annual checkup. I thought it was no big deal since I was young and healthy.

Then, in the wee hours of December 24, 2003, I felt bloated and passed out. My husband, Steve, had to call the ambulance, and my blood pressure was 65/12. I was rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery to find out what was wrong. Turns out I had a large fibroid that had burst and was attached to an artery. I had lost significant blood, and I was so lucky that I lived. I had to stay in the hospital for nine days with three months of rehabilitation. I was told later that if I had gone for my regular check-ups, doctors would have found the fibroid much sooner. This taught me never to take my health for granted.

Now, some twenty years later, I want to say that I have been following my own advice and doing things perfectly for my health and well-being. But reality gets in the way. I do know now that if I don't take the time to really deal with that stress, it always shows up in my body and my mind. My relationships with loved ones suffer, too. The legal profession is demanding, high-stakes, and often all-consuming. While we dedicate ourselves to advocating for others, we sometimes forget to advocate for ourselves. The statistics are sobering: the 2024 Attorney Well-Being Report by Bloomberg Law (<https://aboutblaw.com/bfC3>) showed that attorney recorded depression cases have escalated from 31% in 2019 to 38% in 2023, while anxiety rates have shot up from 64% in 2019 to a peak of 71% in 2023. Substance abuse has increased in our profession, as well, along with disrupted sleep, physical health issues, and personal relationship turmoil. Even more concerning, lawyers rank among the top professions for suicide rates. The number one reason we don't take care of ourselves is we tell ourselves we don't have the time. Or, we think we can handle it because we are strong or want to avoid the stigma of being weak if we ask for help. Many don't even know where to go when they need help. These numbers serve as stark reminders that prioritizing our well-being is essential. We often tell ourselves we "don't have time" to take breaks, but the truth is, we can't afford not to.

Recently, my close friends whisked me away to the San Diego Zoo, where I had no choice but to immerse myself in a world of wildlife, laughter, and joy. They even gave this day a name: Mei Day, which is also an homage to one of my favorite pandas back in China named Mei. There's something freeing about observing animals who do what they want and when they want. The Giant Pandas in San Diego, Yun Chuan and Xin Bao, were so delightful. We didn't see them do much except nap, and the way they nap is hilarious and refreshing. Apparently, when Xin Bao, the girl, ate enough bamboo, she just slouched over anywhere to nap. Her "don't care" attitude was inspiring. I had so much fun setting aside all my responsibilities for one day. It reminded me that stepping away, even briefly, can offer a fresh perspective, restore energy, and help us return to our work with renewed clarity.

If you can't escape for a spontaneous getaway, don't worry—there are plenty of other ways to prioritize well-being. Get up from your desk for a short walk. Go outdoors even for ten minutes to reduce stress and improve your mood. Call a friend or have lunch with a co-worker. Give yourself permission to unplug from work. Better yet, plan that vacation: studies have shown that just the act of planning a vacation helps us reduce stress. Also, there's no shame in seeking support from a therapist or counselor.

Thankfully, we don't have to tackle these challenges alone. The OCBA hosts events that allow us to connect with each other, to unwind, and to have a laugh together. The OCBA's Well-Being Committee is dedicated to supporting attorneys through a variety of programs and events. Whether you prefer an active reset like a group hike or yoga session or a more introspective approach through mindfulness workshops, the OCBA is committed to providing opportunities for members to focus on their health. Well-being isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. So, take that break, go for that walk, and sign up for an event to connect.

Mei Tsang also recommends checking out the red panda, the gorillas, and the koalas at the San Diego Zoo. Mei can be reached at mtsang@umbergzipser.com.

