

May 14, 2020 – Zoom Webcast

Total No. of Participants: 100

WLF Book Club – Screenside Chat with Paula Price and Ritu Goswamy, Esq.

“The New Billable Hour: Bill More Hours, Be More Productive and Still have Work Life Balance”

Ritu has made this book available for free so it can be accessed easily online.

Prior to the event, participants emailed their main concerns (and inquiries to Paula) regarding work-life balance as follows:

- Keeping work and home separate
- Creating and sticking to work
- Physical health
- Not enough work (and worrying about finding work)
- Balancing kids with work
- Staying social
- Not feeling guilty when you are at home with the kids
- Working from home that is a small space you have to share with a partner and/or kids

Discussion

Ritu identified “overworking” as being one of the main issues she sees in the legal profession and setting boundaries as one of the most difficult aspects to implement.

What is the new billable hour? It is a concept, the idea of taking back one billable hour for ourselves as lawyers. Using the wiring in our brain to focus on ourselves, to essentially become your own client for an hour every day. It is easy for us to say that we have to perform acts of self-care but implementing these concepts takes effort. Acts of self-care include activities such as a morning and evening routine, exercise routine, healthy eating habits, meditation. **You must bill your own hour before you bill for other people.**

Ritu explained that neural pathways can rewire the brain and as a result change brain structure. This happens when we perform the same action repeatedly. Neuroplasticity gets affected by the actions we do. Changing the language of “guilt” in our minds, changing how we assign value to our activities and ourselves becomes important because doing so can affect our brain development. Therefore, the shift in thinking has significant implications. Ritu explained that she has one-on-one sessions with lawyers as a consultant, where she asks questions about *why* we, as lawyers do not do certain things for ourselves, such as eat lunch or go for a walk, but we work on other people’s files. You need to ask the questions in order to be able to perform the actions.

Ritu explained that lawyers are “doers” and “thinkers” and we like to control, so letting go of how we think things should be can be difficult in the beginning. Once you let go there is no going back because you shift how you prioritize and think about yourself and your work.

At the end of the day, our productivity is how we think about ourselves, so what is important to us are the activities to which we choose to assign our productive time. The first step in changing perspective is deciding that we have the power and responsibility to change our own lives. We need to change our thinking of “deficiencies” and we do that by deciding what we deserve.

Ritu is also part of community membership in the profession, which helps members come together and share difficulties of dealing with similar issues in the legal profession. The language of “not enough” must change and you must surround yourself with people who share similar goals and ideologies. Accountability to yourself and those in your community then becomes important.

Ritu discussed Ayurveda, the sister-science to Yoga that is focused on balance. Ayurveda teaches that if we get in touch with nature we will gain more balance. We have a habit of going out of balance for extended periods of time, such as during the pandemic, but balance is living day by day without having extended periods of time where we are out of balance as this leads to burnout. It is not enough to say that you will get back into a routine in a month or two; instead what you do every day is what matters. The pandemic, in a way, has forced us to slow down. You need to implement things in your life that promote balance, such as resting, spending time with non-lawyers, being in nature, exercising, having routines. Ritu advised that we need to direct proactive focus on restoring balance daily.

The pandemic and working from home has led to a number of issues such as isolation, working in small spaces, anxiety, fear of losing your job. But we have also been forced to think more about our priorities. The pandemic is a time to slow down; it is a dissolution of structure. We need to practice letting go because things have changed forever. You need to learn to let things fall apart. We have been forced to focus on sustainable practices, cooking more, gardening and changing expectations does not mean lowering those expectations.

Once you figure out what is most difficult for you in terms of self-care and focus on that, all other activities are easier to perform.

Q&A Period

Q: I feel more pressure to work even more than usual to show that I am not just sitting around while working from home during Covid19. How do I deal with that?

A: Change your expectations and adjust your pace. Ask was it working for you before? What can you learn from this time. Look more closely at where this pressure is coming from. Step back and figure out where the expectations are coming from, maybe you have to have an uncomfortable conversation with your boss.

Q: What do you mean by “bill yourself”?

A: It all comes down to values – what are you valuing with your time and your money. Try whatever works for you in terms of keeping track of how much time you spend daily in taking care of yourself – keep track of your time by writing down your billable hour if that works for you or keep track of your commitment to yourself in your head, whatever keeps you accountable.

Q: Which “billable” self-care principle is the most difficult to implement?

A: Different aspects of the billable hour are difficult to implement for different individuals. You have to try every self-care principle and figure out which principle will be the most difficult for you, as an individual to implement.

Q: How does implementing the new billable hour translate into your actual billable hours?

A: Your focus and productivity gets better when you commit to one billable hour for yourself every day. When you change your perspective on what you can get done and take back control of your time, then you will increase focus and as a result will bill more hours. Women in particular, are billing less, they write off more time than men because they feel “guilt” due to lack of focus or multitasking. *You need to learn to work when you are able to work because that way you are productive.*

Takeaways:

- Focus on making the decision and what that decision will look like for you personally
- Prioritize yourself to working
- Be proactive in fitting yourself and your needs in your schedule
- Think about how you let other people treat you – do you say ‘yes’ to everything - and ask if it is currently working for you and choose how you let people treat you
- Be accountable to yourself

Holistic Lawyer – Ritu’s second book that was published in April 2019

You need to use your whole “self”, your gut and inner self to become a more productive lawyer