



Positively Legal: Using Travel and Nature to Avoid Burnout

Skills and Professional Development



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For this month's column, we continued our discussion with one of the primary derailers of a successful long-term legal career – burnout. Building on my 2021 article on [How Positive Practices Help Reduce Burnout](#), I asked GCs for their practical tips to avoid burnout. While there are practices to support people recovering from burnout, adding some of these simple practices into your daily life could be enough to insulate you from burnout in the first place.

What are your tips for lawyers to help prevent burnout?

Health before wealth



Freya Smith, General Counsel and Secretary, [Claim Central Consolidated](#)

Smith advocates for self-care such as good sleep, nutrition, exercise, and social connection. If you find your schedule is too tight, she suggests considering “exactly how you are spending your time” and looking for opportunities to “limit your exposure to non-critical tasks and situations and increase your investment in those that boost your energy.”

She also says you need to know when saying no is the right answer and not feeling guilty about it. Smith is a strong believer in the importance to taking rest and time away from work.

Resting and unplugging is “vital to long-term health because it heals your body, reduces stress, boosts creativity, improves productivity and enhances decision making processes,” Smith says. However, she thinks the real challenge for most lawyers is making sure that a break is a true break from work, “which means no checking emails or other work-related duties, which can be very challenging in our 24/7 world.” If she can find the time, Smith tries to focus on “idleness” which she finds “indispensable to my brain and functioning.”

Schedule microbreaks

McGregor suggests building exercise into your day and planning it in advance to make sure it

happens come rain or shine. She suggests getting outside for fresh air and sunshine every day as well as taking micro breaks between meetings to “stretch, make a cup of tea, fill your water bottle – just take a moment to pause between meetings.”

While she believes in the importance of building in time for family and friends, she is a strong believer in making time for herself: “Setting personal goals and giving myself personal time outside of the time I commit to work and my family is really important to me and ultimately makes me a better leader, colleague, Mum, and wife.”



Catriona McGregor, General Counsel and Secretary, [Domain](#)

McGregor understands the need to find a balance to counteract the peaks of work, saying “you can only run hard for so long before you need to refuel and reset. Then, once you have had that break, you will be ready to go again with fresh energy.” For McGregor, this rest includes taking small breaks and celebrating small milestones during long projects as well as taking a longer rest and bigger celebration at the end.

Nature is one of her resets: “Being outside, in nature, in the mountains or close to water is a great way to mentally rest and recharge. I may be running or skiing or participating in some other high energy activity but for me the relaxation comes from being outside and moving my body in nature.” McGregor also finds travel, even somewhere relatively local as a way to take a break from the everyday.



Teresa Cleary, General Counsel and Secretary,

[Elixinol Wellness Limited](#)

Cleary is a proponent of scheduling “regular breaks and holidays, even just long weekends. Even

when working from home, you need a break from your home or a break from your desk!" This could include walking in your local park, taking a long weekend up the coast or planning a "well deserved holiday to fully disconnect and avoid burnout."

Whatever you choose, she suggests it should be something that brings you joy. Cleary argues that, in reality, "everything at work can wait and you'll be surprised how organized people can be when they know you are taking a week or two of leave!"

Cleary argues taking time away from work to focus on yourself and your loved ones will help to recharge you "so that you can perform your best when you are at work."

The importance of rest also resonates with her, "I know that when I work 12 hour days on a regular basis, my productivity declines but if I pack up my day a bit earlier and address those outstanding items the next day, tasks can often be finished quickly and the quality of my output is better.

Taking time away from work to focus on yourself and your loved ones will help to recharge you "so that you can perform your best when you are at work."

- TERESA CLEARY, General Counsel and Secretary, Elixinol Wellness Limited

Communication is key

Jones reflects that increased communication lies at the heart of a healthy team environment, especially when working remotely. As a leader, she tries to pre-empt burnout by recognising it in others and suggesting the team member "take the morning off, have a long weekend away or organise a holiday" depending on their level of stress. "Offering help," she says, "can be a big stress reliever." This could include helping them break down a matter into its parts to make it feel less overwhelming and give them back a sense of control." Jones also thinks having the right resources for the size of the business helps give a leader the ability to move team members out of matter without creating large gaps.

Jones is also an advocate of taking time away, whether a morning off, a weekend away or a holiday which gives you the ability to recharge and refocus perspective. She believes "you need to be in-tune with your own mental wellness first and foremost."



Kate Jones, General Counsel, Company Secretary,

and Head of Compliance, [Samsung Electronics](#)

As an example, I knew I needed time out of the workforce after the last couple of years and quit my job in February to focus on myself and my family. I was fortunate to be able to do this but it has been really important for me to do some to do so.”

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Step back to find time



Chad Aboud, General Counsel, [AudienceView](#)

Aboud suggests ways to reduce burnout and overwhelm including forcing yourself to “carve out time to step back and review what you do.” Giving yourself the time to reflect and consider what you and your team does helps you to find solutions to create a healthier workplace.

This includes finding any areas of the business to streamline through templates or decentralization and identifying areas which can be efficiently outsourced – all of which support a legal function. For example, Aboud says, “we implemented legal tech which has removed a lot of manual work, we created FAQ talk tracks for client facing teams to answer more straightforward questions.”

Keen on running in the woods three times a week to get away from his urban environment, Aboud finds it allows him to “generate creativity and find peace that I cannot find elsewhere.” In addition, Aboud also listens to a podcast on mindfulness or relationship dynamics during his run which we think helps to “fuel ideas for managing and engaging effectively.”

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solutions to create a healthier workplace.

- CHAD ABOUD, GENERAL COUNSEL, AUDIENCEVIEW

Extend the mindset to others

Bryant describes how, while working remotely, members of the team “took it upon themselves to check in with people who lived alone and/or were foreigners to Australia, meaning their family were all overseas and they did not have any ability to travel and see them. I think this was appreciated on both sides particularly during the second lockdown.” Following the lockdowns, she has seen a shift in the business and people are “no longer expected to be on unnecessary calls, particularly after hours.” She thinks that “this has allowed people a better ability to take control of their working and non-working hours, which were blurred during the remote working component.”

Cementing her more recent habit of spending time exercising outdoors and moving away from sitting down at her computer, Bryant thinks she has made a big difference.

She also believes that, “spending quality time with family on the weekends, or evenings, rather than being focused on work during that time period (unless there is a particular requirement to work on that evening) can also be a good break from constant legal work.”



General Counsel, [Beiersdorf Australia Ltd](#)

These useful suggestions can be included in our everyday lives with little effort but great effect. Later this month, a bonus Positively Legal, will further consider how taking time to rest and travel and spending time in nature can supercharge our wellbeing.

[Check out ACC's Resource Library.](#)

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Caterina Cavallaro is associate general counsel at VGW.

She combines technical legal skills with practical business understanding and a love of innovation, project management, and legal technology to improve ways of working within the legal industry. She is a member of the ACC's In-House In-Health and Legal Technology and Innovation Special Interest

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In addition to her legal skills she has a Diploma of Positive Psychology and Wellness and is a freelance writer. Her “Positively Legal” column for the *ACC Docket* focuses on the intersection of neuroscience, positive psychology, and in-house practice by interviewing experts and fellow lawyers and curating up to date quality research, podcasts and books to help lawyers learn to take control of their own wellness and support their careers.

Outside of work, Cavallaro loves traveling, snorkeling, meditating and spending time in nature.