



The Resilient Lawyer

by Leading Minds

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About your Course

The course is delivered via three recorded sessions with an accompanying activity workbook. You are encouraged to complete all of the exercises to ensure that you gain the maximum benefit from the course. Additionally, you will have access to email support from the course provider for up to 12 months. Outcomes of the course include:

- Increased resilience to stress and the demands of the legal profession
- Improved capacity to translate academic and technical skills into efficient and effective results
- Improved self-leadership skills

Everyone who completes the course receives:

- An activity workbook to support your learning
- Continuous email support from Leading Minds

About Leading Minds

Leading Minds is the premier provider of integrative mental health and resilience training programmes for the legal sector.

Sector-specific

Our training is designed to be relevant, current, practical and tailored specifically to lawyers' challenges.

Expert trainers

All Leading Minds multi-disciplinary trainers come from corporate backgrounds and thoroughly understand the demands and pressures of the legal industry.

Innovative and evidence-based content

To encourage sustainable behaviour change, our sessions focus on translating evidence-based strategies for elite performance into practical habits that lawyers can effectively implement and maintain in the long-term.

Resilience in the Legal Sector

Besides the academic prerequisites for success in the legal profession, the relentless pressure and demanding work environment require exceptional levels of mental fitness and resilience.

Along with the pressure of billable hours, intense deadlines and the cognitive demands of the role, it often entails working closely with people in a variety of emotional states, trying to establish as much detail as possible to further your clients interests. At the same time, modern day work is global, and remote working means communicating regularly across different channels with people on varying frequency levels.

Research from the last ten years has highlighted the health impact of these challenges and demands on lawyers' mental health and wellbeing at all levels within firms. Furthermore, research conducted specifically on junior lawyers emphasises the notable gap between their technical excellence and the essential self-management skills required to thrive in a high-pressured environment.

Regardless of what stage of your legal career you're at, 2020 certainly demonstrated that sustainable success in the sector requires much more than academic and technical excellence. Instead, it is a lawyers' psychological, physical and emotional resilience that has the most significant impact on their capacity to translate their potential into results.

The good news is that while certain factors might make some individuals more resilient than others, resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop. Unsurprisingly then, the [National Task Force on Lawyer Wellbeing](#) recommended that one of the most important things law firms and organisations can do to help build lawyer wellbeing is to offer courses, information and workshops on developing resilience.

With that in mind, this course has been designed for TCLA members to support inspiring lawyers to achieve sustainable levels of elite performance by equipping them with the skills and understanding of how they can mentally and emotionally manage the intense pressures of the legal sector.

The Stress Response

It's no secret that working in the legal sector can be stressful, and although we need a certain amount of stress to help us thrive and grow, it's crucial that we understand how to proactively manage stress and apply strategies that help us remain resilient under prolonged periods of intense pressure.

As humans, we all have a common baseline biological response to stress; our nervous systems fight, flight or freeze response. It is part of our evolutionary survival mechanism and designed to prepare us to do whatever it takes to ensure our personal survival.

However, a situation doesn't have to be physically dangerous to activate the stress response. Every-day pressures can activate it as well, for example, you might feel stress before sitting an exam or during an important interview. Even in these situations (which are hardly life-or-death), the stress response activates to help you perform well under pressure. It can help you rise to a challenge and meet it with alertness, focus, and strength. Facing these challenges — rather than backing away from them — is a part of learning and growing.

In an ideal world, when the challenge is over, the stress response subsides. You can relax and recharge, and be ready for a new challenge. In real life it doesn't always work out like that! The way we work and live means that we are constantly bombarded with potential stressors or triggers ranging from exam pressure, competitive work environments, billable hours, excessive technology use and personal worries. This means that our stress response remains "switched on" for prolonged periods of time. This is where challenges can occur - the stress response is not designed to be permanently activated, and when it is, it can lead to a whole host of physical, mental and emotional health problems and affect our capacity to perform at our best.

The following exercise on the stress funnel helps us recognise our personal vulnerability to stress and identify personal strategies that will help us minimise potential stressors and increase our resilience.

The Stress Funnel

The level of vulnerability a person carries is represented by the size of the funnel into which their every-day stressors flow. The larger the funnel, the greater a person's resilience is. The smaller the funnel, the more vulnerable that person is to stress. The size of someone's funnel can be down to a number of factors including their upbringing and early childhood experiences e.g. being bullied or neglected. The more of these issues there are, the smaller the container, so it will overflow quicker than someone who has a large container and is more resilient to stress. Those who have low vulnerability are less likely to experience mental health issues and remain more resilient under pressure.

When the funnel overflows, difficulties can develop. During the overflowing process your 'stress signature' can be identified, as the way in which people display stress can be different e.g. withdrawal or avoidance, overworking, irritability, emotional outbursts, procrastination and so on.

Our mindset influences our stress signature too. The strength of the stress response is related to the level of perceived threat rather than an actual, physical threat. This is why two people can experience the same situation and have different stress reactions to the same thing. Knowing this, people can reduce the strength of their stress response by reminding themselves that this particular threat may not be as immediate as they feel it is.

Coping strategies are represented by the tap at the bottom of the container. They can include things such as having a healthy diet, managing expectations with your supervisor and planning and prioritising your work. It is also important to remember that we all use unhelpful coping strategies at times, and that some unhelpful coping strategies can come about as a result of other vulnerabilities, or difficult, stressful life experiences including trauma. They may have been useful to the person in small doses or under different circumstances before becoming problematic, or be the only way they know how to cope at the time. An example of unhelpful coping strategies would be alcohol / substance misuse, self-harming or overworking yourself. When using unhelpful coping mechanisms the tap remains blocked, so stress will continue to build up. However, as with any skill in life, it is possible to develop new, helpful coping strategies.

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

What are some of the things currently filling your stress funnel? Examples could include:

- Environmental - Housemates often argue, I'm caught in the middle and can't focus on my studies or work
- Interpersonal - Arguments with friends
- Intrapersonal - Poor diet (living on caffeine, sugar and highly processed foods)

What area/issue is most in need of attention?

What can I change?

What do I need to accept?

Who can I ask for support?

What helpful / unhelpful coping strategies do I have?

Psychological and Emotional Agility

“The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.”

- William James

Our thoughts affect how we feel and behave. If we're feeling happy and excited chances are we've been thinking positive or helpful thoughts. On the other hand, if we're feeling anxious, upset or depressed, it's likely that we've been thinking negative or unhelpful thoughts. All of us at times have unhelpful thoughts that make us feel stressed or upset, that's a normal part of life. However, if you regularly or continuously experience low mood, feel stressed, upset or anxious, you might have developed unhelpful thinking patterns. These habitual errors in thinking are referred to as cognitive distortions.

If you're human, you have likely fallen for a few of the numerous cognitive distortions at one time or another. The difference between those who occasionally stumble into a cognitive distortion and those who struggle with them on a more long-term basis is the ability to identify and modify or correct these faulty patterns of thinking.

Unhelpful thinking patterns or cognitive distortions can affect our mental health and resilience by keeping us in a negative mental state that can increase our risk of things such as anxiety disorder and depression.

The next section explores some examples of cognitive distortions and is followed by useful strategies to help recognize and respond to these distortions in a more helpful way.

Examples of cognitive distortions (unhelpful thinking patterns) include:

All-or-nothing / black & white / polarised thinking: something is one way (e.g. good) or the opposite way (e.g. bad), with no shades of grey in between

Mind-reading: a belief that one can know another person's thoughts based on their behaviour

Labelling: labelling a person as a whole based on a behaviour

Overgeneralization: this is exactly what it sounds like it; for example, one person treated me badly so that means all people will treat me badly

Personalisation: blaming oneself for external events

Always being right: being convinced that one's thoughts/actions are correct

Blaming: blaming another person for causing one's own emotions or experiences

Catastrophizing: expecting that the extreme worst-case scenario will happen

Emotional reasoning: I feel it, therefore it is so

Fallacy of control: the locus of control may be seen as fully external (i.e. I don't have control over what happens to me) or fully internal (i.e. I am responsible for what's happening to others around me)

Filtering / disqualifying the positive: most often this occurs as filtering out the positive and only seeing the negative

Shoulds and musts: some shoulds are reasonable, like we all "should" follow the law, but others are not (e.g. I "should" work for at least 14 hours every day)

Catch, Challenge, Change:

The catch, challenge, change technique is a useful strategy to help manage unhelpful thinking patterns. With practise, it helps us become more consciously aware of Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANT's) as they arise. This creates an opportunity for us to question their validity and decide whether or not we can reframe them into more helpful thoughts.

Catch: Catching negative thoughts means gaining an awareness of them as soon as possible. The earlier you become aware of thoughts that are unhelpful or self-defeating the sooner you can begin to challenge those thoughts. Techniques such as mindfulness help us experience more awareness in the present moment.

Challenge: Stop and think about what you're thinking. Is it really true? Do you have evidence to back it up? Would other people interpret things in the same way? This is perhaps the most difficult part of the exercise as nearly everybody believes their own thoughts are right.

Change: At this point, if appropriate, the aim is to reframe unhelpful thoughts with more realistic thoughts.

The following is an example of how catch challenge, change works:

Where / When	Monday on Zoom
Event	Meeting with my supervisor. She points out one of my mistakes in a piece of recent work
Emotion	Scared, anxious, worried
Automatic Thoughts	My supervisor thinks I'm incompetent, she secretly dislikes me and thinks I'm useless, my traineeship and future career is ruined
Rational Response	By learning about my mistakes I can take action to grow and develop my skills. I recognise and accept that I got some things wrong, and she was quite polite about it. She also points out my successes and praises me when I do well so there is no need for me to read into this as a personal attack

Values Alignment

In a nutshell, your values are the things that you believe are important in the way you work and live your life. Whether you realise it consciously or not, your values subconsciously determine our priorities and we use them to measure how well our life is turning out. Unlike goals, which represent what we want to achieve, values are ways of living that can never be obtained like an object, and can only be realised from moment to moment.

Research findings suggest that connecting to personal values can help people be more resilient in the face of stress. The process of “privately clarifying, publicly articulating, and consciously acting on” core values is a great source of strength in helping one face adversity and emerge stronger than before (Patterson and Kelleher, 2005). In line with this claim, affirmations of personal values have been found to attenuate perceptions of threat, reduce rumination after failure, and reduce defensive responses to threatening information. Another study showed that reflecting on personal values buffered physiological and psychological stress responses during a laboratory stress challenge.

The explanation as to why this is the case is multifaceted. Some studies have shown how values affirmation relates to a lowering in the primary stress hormone cortisol which may be related to our psychological need for congruency (a state in which a person's ideal self and actual experience are consistent or very similar).

Exploring your personal values to cultivate resilience

When you define your personal values, you discover what’s truly meaningful and important to you. Once you have identified your personal values the aim is to intentionally align your behaviours to them (how you live and work). By living in alignment with your values, you increase your resilience to external stressors and adversity.

You can use the following exercise to begin the process of identifying your core values:

Step 1: Take a moment to consider a challenging event that is either currently taking place or has happened in the past. For example, you may have been rejected for a training contract at one point. Briefly describe the stressful event below:

Step 2: Consider why it is worth it to you to persevere and get through this challenging life situation. Come up with as many reasons as you can, and list them in the space below.

Step 3: Identify the times you felt happiest, most proud, fulfilled and satisfied. Ask yourself what needs or desires were fulfilled, how did those events/experiences give your life meaning.

Step 4: Your values are the things that you consider to be important in life, such as honesty, kindness, care, autonomy, helping others, and financial independence. With consideration to the reasons you listed in step 2 and 3, think of values that capture the essence of each of these reasons. Finding the perfect value for each reason is not so important; what matters is if the value makes sense to you personally. It should also be noted that there may be more than one value per reason.

Step 5: This step involves creating a visual reminder of the values you specified in step 4. Using a blank piece of paper, represent your values visually in a way that you chose. After you have completed your visual values reminder, you can put it somewhere where you can see it every day (e.g., on the refrigerator or your desk). In this way, it can help you to stay in touch with what makes the struggle worth going through.

An Empowering Daily Routine

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” - Aristotle

Resilience is that it's not something we can leave to chance.

The demands of modern life mean that it's often all too easy to let our coping strategies slide and we end up slipping into unhelpful habits. In order to perform optimally, achieve sustainable success in the legal sector and remain physically, mentally and emotionally healthy, it's essential that we proactively design our lives accordingly.

Establishing a positive daily routine provides structure and certainty (both of which are important for managing stress) and helps you create momentum that will carry you forward on the days when you feel like you giving up. Following a daily routine can help you establish priorities, limit procrastination, keep track of goals, and can even make you healthier. By establishing habits, you lower your reliance on willpower and motivation. Instead, by consistently repeating your desired behaviours, over time your brain lays down new neural pathways that make the behaviours automatic, essentially taking conscious effort and reliance on willpower and motivation out of the equation - just like when you learned to drive a car or brush your teeth!

When it comes to ingraining new habits, remember that “the compound effect” is always at play. The compound effect is the strategy of reaping huge rewards (or losses) from small, seemingly insignificant actions that are consistently repeated over time. A great example of the compound effect in action is the “latte factor” which was popularised by author Davis Bach. It demonstrates that a small amount of money spent on a regular basis costs us far more than we imagine, for example a morning latte that costs you £3.90 equates to £1,372 per year, and that's before you factor in the loss of potential earnings if you had invested that money instead. The same concept is true of our “resilience budget”. It's our small, seemingly inconsequential daily habits that are either depositing to or withdrawing from our resilience reserves.

Now that you have completed your course, it's time to identify the key habits and coping strategies that will help you cultivate resilience and ensure you go on to thrive in your legal career.

Recommended Resources

Reading list:

Mindset and self-leadership

- Emotional Intelligence 2.0 - Jean Greaves and Travis Bradberry
- Psycho-Cybernetics - Dr. Maxwell Maltz
- The Chimp Paradox - Prof. Steve Peters
- Seven Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen R. Covey
- HBR's Must Reads - Managing Yourself
- How successful people lead - John C. Maxwell
- Brilliant NLP - David Molden and Pat Hutchinson

Goals, habits and behaviour change

- The Compound Effect - Darren Hardy
- Atomic Habits - James Clear
- The Slight Edge - Jeff Olson

Productivity and performance

- Flow - Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- Deep Work - Cal Newport
- The ONE Thing - Gary W. Keller and Jay Papasan

Nutrition, sleep and exercise

- Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain - John Ratey
- Why We Sleep - Matthew Walker
- Mindful Eating, Mindful Life - Thich Nhat Hanh and Lilian Cheung

Mindfulness and meditation

- Mindfulness, Finding Peace in a Frantic World - Mark Williams and Danny Penman
- The Untethered Soul - Michael A. Singer
- Wherever You Go, There You Are - John Kabat-Zinn

Podcasts:

- Leading Minds [podcast](#)
- Impact Theory - Tom Bilyeu
- Feel Better, Live More - Dr Chatterjee

Sources of Support

- [Law Care](#)
- [Samaritans](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [BEAT Eating Disorders](#)
- [Gamble Aware](#)
- [LGBT Health & Wellbeing](#)
- [Talk to Frank](#)

Disclaimer

The information given in this workbook and in the supporting webinars are for informational and educational purposes only and is not intended as, or to be used as, a substitute or replacement for, medical advice, medical nutrition therapy, or individualised counselling.