

LEGAL MANAGEMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ADMINISTRATORS

Powerful Mental Toughness Skills for the Busy Legal Administrator

By Jack Singer

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Just like good athletes, legal administrators are all gifted professionals. I've seen parallels between the two in my 33 years of work as a professional sports psychologist, and in my current role as legal administrator consultant.

But your true talents may stay buried, bound up in self-doubt, lack of confidence and stress. The biggest challenge you face is internal — how you handle your emotions when you face stress-producing challenges. Once you master your stress, your true talent will consistently emerge.

YOUR FIVE-STEP MENTAL TOUGHNESS GAME PLAN

"Mental toughness" is a state of mind that helps athletes and legal administrators control their emotions when faced with myriad stressors that could challenge their confidence and resilience. Just as with elite athletes, this easily learned five-step technique is the ideal game plan for every administrator to help bounce back from the stressors inherent on the job:

Once you master your stress, your true talent will consistently emerge.

1. CATCH YOURSELF WHENEVER YOU HAVE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS.

For example, thoughts beginning with “What if,” “I hope I don’t” and “I won’t be able to” are all stress-producing thoughts that lead to feeling overwhelmed and burned out. So, catch these thoughts as soon as they rear their ugly heads and stop them dead in their tracks. Wear a No. 64 rubber band on your wrist (the fat bands that come with your mail). When you recognize a negative thought, snap it and tell yourself, “Stop this silly thinking!” Then immediately go to Step 2.

2. TAKE A FEW CENTERING BREATHS TO RELAX.

First, breathe in through your nose to the count of four; then hold your breath to the count of four. Next, let out a big exhale through your mouth to the count of seven — it’s the most relaxing kind of breathing. Your tummy should be moving out when you inhale and moving back in when you exhale. Repeat this a few times to calm yourself.

3. CHALLENGE THE THOUGHT.

Most of our negative thoughts are exaggerations and irrational, without any substantive basis. Ask yourself questions such as these:

- “Where is the evidence to support my fear of failure?”
- “What is the actual probability that this will happen?”
- “What other possibilities are there?”
- “Do I have evidence to contradict this stress-producing thought?”
- “I succeeded the last time I was in this situation, so why can’t I do it again?”

4. REPEAT YOUR IDENTITY STATEMENT.

An identity statement is a realistic statement about your greatest strengths and your history of accomplishing great things in your career and in your present job. Forget about modesty — this is the time to remind yourself about your true talent and your abilities and accomplishments. Put your statement in writing, somewhere that’s easily accessible. Here’s an example:

“In my career, I have been able to run a very successful firm, balancing all of the plates in the air at the same time. Sure, there have been some regrets and challenges, but I have been complimented many times and feel great about my accomplishments. I don’t have to be perfect to be valuable and successful in my career.”

5. ANCHOR THIS WHOLE PROCESS WITH ANOTHER CENTERING BREATH.

Then go on with planning your task, free of debilitating stress.

There you have it. It’s a really quick and simple technique to use every time your emotions begin to get rattled. Just like with any new skill, the more you practice it, the easier it becomes, and it will become a natural part of your emotional control throughout the day. Give it a try — it really works!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Singer, PhD, is a professional psychologist, speaker and stress mastery mentor for legal administrators and attorneys. Previously, he worked as a professional sports psychologist, consulting with Olympic, world champion and professional athletes. Contact Dr. Jack to learn more about his keynote speaking, exclusive mentoring services for legal administrators and his programs for firm re-TREATS.

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