

PRACTICE TIPS



WORKING WELL

The Nature Experience for Lawyers

By Lori A. Buza

NJSBA Lawyer Well-Being Committee Chair

KSBranigan Law

Science tells us that seeing, hearing, and experiencing what is around you affects your mood and overall health. Studies show strong associations linking well-being to the “nature experience.” Empirical evidence reveals that people who spend time outdoors have:

- boosted their immune system
- improved memory, concentration, creativity
- lowered stress and physical manifestations of stress
- decreased anxiety and depression symptoms
- restored mental strength and better quality of sleep

Research suggests that just 120 minutes per week of time in nature may improve one’s overall health and psychological well-being. This could include exposure to the green grass and trees/flowers, bodies of water, stargazing, birdwatching/bird listening, hikes, walks and other outdoor activities. The studies indicate that you may split that time over the course of days, or in a “recharge” day once per week. So maybe it’s time to find a way to visit the great outdoors!

Even just looking at nature scenes is linked to positive well-being effects. Studies conducted in hospitals show that photos of nature help patients cope with pain; and in rooms with pictures of nature, patients spent less time in the hospital. Indeed, other studies show that nature deprivation—lack of time in the natural world (e.g. too much time in front of the computer)—had the converse effect such that it increased rates of depression. Having just one plant in a school room has also been linked to lowered stress and anxiety in students.

Meetings, court appearances, client consults...oh my. It seems daunting—the thought of having to find a way to also get outside. But frankly, if it can bring you better health, mood, and concentration, wouldn’t it be worth it to find the time? Personally, I like to experience nature once a day with a walk or visit to the park; but as noted, you can choose to bundle your exposure to the outdoors in one day per week. Schedule outdoors time into your



legal experience by adding it to your calendar and sticking with it as an appointment you cannot miss. Bring plants into your office, include nature scenes on your computer and phone wallpaper, and open the window whenever you can. If you have a good view from your office, position your desk to face the window and periodically look out the window for reprieves from your lawyering. In all these experiences be mindful, taking in the rich colors, sounds and beauty of nature around you. Prioritize the “nature experience” for yourself, and you will both see and *feel* a difference in your life.