

# Why Lawyer Burnout Is Still An Issue in 2021

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Lawyer burnout is a growing but long-standing issue in the legal industry that over the past few years has become normalized and talked about in the open more often. Between heavy caseloads, demanding clients, and meeting tight deadlines, a lawyer's work-life balance quickly gets put on the back burner. As we've seen with the introduction of technology in the legal industry, traditions created years ago won't cut it today.

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened this issue and brought to light how the imbalance in a lawyer's work-life plays on their mental health and overall wellbeing. With more legal professionals working remotely, it's harder than ever to create boundaries, and burnout is at an all-time high.

## Why All the Burnout?

Burnout is a form of exhaustion that is experienced emotionally, mentally, and physically. [It can be caused by multiple stressors](#) including work, family, finances, world events, and more. For an attorney, this could look like heavy caseloads, increased client demands, criticism over work quality, and spending time away from family. When all of these factors add up, you have a recipe for burnout.

New stressors brought on by the pandemic such as isolation due to working remotely, home child care and learning, disconnection from family members, or even deaths from the pandemic have thrown new curveballs for lawyers to deal with on top of their work.

As for many industries, 2020 and beyond has been no short of stress-inducing. Marry this with the ambition and work ethic of most lawyers, you get burnout. It's one thing to know what burnout is, but identifying and taking active steps to combat it is what's really vital to maintaining the wellbeing of lawyers.

## Identifying Burnout

It doesn't happen overnight. Burnout is a slow build which makes it difficult to pinpoint. This is why it's important to figure out what stressors will trigger your burnout. Burnout is not a blanket condition for everyone and every lawyer experiences it at different levels/intensities. To pinpoint when burnout is building, lawyers should routinely do a pulse check on themselves and how they're feeling.

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Though everyone's triggers are different, there are two early warning signs that everyone can use as a guide to identify burnout.

## **Exhaustion**

This isn't just your everyday exhaustion from work or lack of sleep. If you're feeling fatigued as soon as you wake up even after getting plenty of sleep, it may be a sign that you're burned out. Having an overwhelming feeling of exhaustion can decrease your quality of work, how you interact with others and [can even impact your reaction time or response to danger](#).

## **Loss of interest**

Another signal of burnout to be conscious of is the feeling of detachment or becoming disengaged. This manifests in various ways such as procrastination, pessimistic thoughts, canceling plans, missing important deadlines, and more. Typically, loss of interest piggybacks off of exhaustion and ultimately leads to burnout

Warning signals of burnout come in a variety of shapes in sizes but they will likely fall under these two categories. If you're making more mistakes at work, tired, or finding it hard to concentrate on basic tasks, it may be time to take a break.

## **Taking Time For Yourself**

How can busy lawyers find time for themselves when so many people need them? It's a hard question for dedicated lawyers to answer. Many lawyers went into the legal industry specifically for that reason, to help others and uphold the law. What lawyers must grasp is that they can't help others if they don't help themselves first. Showing up healthy and alert is the best way to help your clients, colleagues, and family.

If you're having trouble wrapping your mind around tending to your clients and finding time for yourself, these everyday wellness tips will ease your mind. Because yes, you can (and must) do both!

## **Get some sleep**

The best place to start is with your sleep schedule. [Sleep is essential](#) and it allows you to "recharge your batteries" each day. Taking the time to prioritize a full night's sleep goes a long way toward avoiding burnout.

This goes for answering emails before bed. For optimal sleep, close the email app and put your phone away at least an hour before bedtime! Emails are stressful enough, but to actively respond to them in the middle of the night creates unhealthy boundaries for both you and your clients. Setting the tone that you're available to their beckoning call will promote them to contact you at all hours.

## **Take a break**

It's important to take breaks and separate from your duties as a lawyer. You have a personality and hobbies outside of work so it's important to find time to disconnect from work and reconnect with things that bring you joy. This can be as simple as taking a walk, watching a movie, exercising

between client meetings, golfing, or taking a long lunch — anything!

## Know your limitations

Just because clients think of you as a superhero, doesn't mean you're superhuman. As we mentioned before it's essential that you set clear boundaries with your clients. This will ultimately save you stress and ensure your clients are using their time with you efficiently. Creating boundaries can start with specific work start and end times. Every day for a lawyer is different, but you should aim to stick to these work hours the majority of the time to limit burnout.

## Body and mind

Physical fitness plays a major role in mental wellness. It not only helps with lawyer burnout, but it can help enhance your mental sharpness, concentration, mood, and more. An added bonus: exercise helps battle the hormones created by stress, making it your go-to for stress relief.

Yes, you have time and no, your exercise of choice doesn't need to be strenuous. Taking just 30 minutes for a short walk before work, yoga, pilates, or fitness class can greatly [reduce your stress levels](#).

## Avoiding Lawyer Burnout

Lawyers are notorious for overworking and have difficulties managing stress. During the pandemic, that didn't change. If anything, it enhanced the issue surrounding lawyer burnout. However, as the legal industry continues to evolve and [make lawyers' mental health a priority](#), the outlook for change is positive. Though there is much work to be done, one fact is true. Burnout can be avoided if lawyers and the industry as a whole take actionable steps to identify and prevent it.

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National Law Review, Volume XI, Number 252

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/why-lawyer-burnout-still-issue-2021>