

NEWSLETTER

FROM VISION TO REALITY:
Dream Big, Push Boundaries, and Make History



Ronni Whitehead Otieno
2023-2024 President

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The Black Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, Inc. (BWL) proudly celebrates a year of remarkable achievements in the Los Angeles community. From the corridors of power to the forefront of justice, Black women are shaping the future of Los Angeles with their unwavering commitment, passion, and dedication to service.

At our Installation and Awards dinner, we began the year by honoring Mayor Karen Bass, the first Black woman mayor of Los Angeles; Franita Tolson, the first Black woman dean of USC Gould School of Law; and Adrienne Logan, the Global General Counsel at Vans, a VF Company. This set the tone for the year and our theme, "From Vision to Reality: Dream Big, Push Boundaries, and Make History." We set ambitious goals to grow membership, increase visibility, deliver exceptional programming, and revitalize information systems, and we have not only met but exceeded these targets.

Our membership has grown significantly, with a variety of events contributing to a sizable increase in active members. This success is mirrored by our enhanced visibility, achieved through strategic use of social media. Notable partnerships with sister bar organizations, the Defense Bar, and the Plaintiffs Bar introduced Black women lawyers to new audiences. BWL also signed on as a founding member of the Los Angeles County Unity Bar, an organization dedicated to diversifying the bench, further solidifying our presence in the Los Angeles legal community.

Throughout the year, our programming has been exceptional. Highlights include the Intergenerational Discussion at the general body meeting in October, a November event on Criminal Legal System Reform, toy and food drives in November and December, a CLE on workplace issues facing women in January, and a February conversation with the presidents of the CAALA and WLALA. Women's History Month in March featured events with sister bars and a fundraiser for APAIT.

In April, we partnered with the Writers Bloc for a discussion with Stacey Abrams and a collaboration with the Association of Black Women Physicians led to a delightful tea party and skincare discussion. The May general body meeting focused on in-house lawyers, and June celebrated past presidents, lifetime members, and new

judges. Our education committee held a mixer for law students, bar preparation sessions and attended career day at Dorsey High School.

Our wellness series, including Zumba, yoga, and our second annual 5K walk/run, was also a highlight. Our Pro Bono Committee members volunteered at the FAME Legal Clinic and held a fireside chat on LA's housing crisis and eviction landscape. Modernizing internal operations was another priority. We streamlined our internal processes by implementing Google Drive, ensuring smooth organizational functioning.

The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the inaugural BWL abroad trip, a dream come true for our organization. This trip to Switzerland, held at the Pepperdine campus at Château D'Hauteville, offered members an unforgettable experience.

Participants enjoyed the magnificent views of the Swiss Riviera, engaged in cultural immersion in Vevey, Zurich, and Basel, and attended enriching CLE sessions. This journey was more than just an educational excursion; it was a testament to our commitment to dreaming big and pushing boundaries. The breathtaking scenery, combined with professional development opportunities, made this a lifetime experience that participants will cherish forever.

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As the President of BWL, I am profoundly inspired by the immense impact that our members have made within our community. Their resilience, determination, and commitment to justice serve as a beacon of hope and empowerment. Black women are not just breaking barriers; they are redefining the narrative of leadership.

Together, let us continue to uplift, celebrate, and support the invaluable contributions of Black women lawyers and leaders in Los Angeles and beyond.

Lastly, I want to congratulate our board members on a job well done! The successes of this year would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of our officers, board members and committee members.

I would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to our sponsors for their unwavering support. Together, we have achieved remarkable success and look forward to continuing to dream big and reach even greater heights in the future.



NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Devon Hein

Deputy Federal Public Defender,
Non-Capital Habeas Unit



The Power of Pause: Why Taking Your Leave is Non-Negotiable

by **Shawnell T. Barnett**
Trial Attorney, National Labor Relations Board

As summer approaches, many of us are daydreaming about being “outside” – from vacations to solo adventures, the urge to unwind is real. However, for Black women attorneys, the idea of shutting down our laptops and switching our work phones to “Do Not Disturb” may feel more stressful than relaxing. I understand why sometimes we are afraid to take and use our leave effectively due to fear of being punished or overlooked. At the same time, as a labor and employment attorney, I recognize how crucial it is to take your leave. The fear is real, but here is the reality.

Reasoning Past the Fear

Fear of punishment is a significant reason many employees hesitate to take their leave. The worry that taking time off might lead to negative consequences, such as being overlooked for promotions or being seen as less committed, is pervasive. However, it's essential to understand that these fears, while understandable, are often unfounded. Here's why you shouldn't be afraid to take your well-deserved break:

1. We Are All Replaceable: While this might sound disheartening, it's actually liberating. Knowing that the world doesn't stop turning when you take a break can help you let go of the fear that your absence will cause irreparable damage. Your work will be handled, and your role will be there when you return.

2. We Are Skilled and Valuable: Many of us underestimate our value in the workplace. Remember, your skills and contributions are recognized and valued. Taking time off doesn't diminish your worth; it actually ensures you can continue to perform at your best.

3. Legal Protections Are in Place: Numerous laws protect employees' rights to take leave. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), for example, provides eligible employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year. Additionally, anti-retaliation laws ensure that taking leave cannot be used against you.

The Benefits of Taking a Break

Nor is taking leave being lazy or self-indulgent. Work-life balance has a history as a dirty word, but how can being balanced be a bad thing? Spoiler alert: it can't.

1. Burnout Affects Health: Chronic stress and burnout can lead to severe health issues, including anxiety, depression, and physical ailments like heart disease. Taking time off is not just about resting; it's about preserving your long-term health.

2. Utilizing Earned Benefits: Using your leave is a right that you have earned through your hard work and dedication. It's essential to take advantage of this benefit to ensure you are getting the full value of your employment package. Taking leave is not only about resting but also about recognizing and rewarding yourself for your efforts, which can enhance your sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction.



How to Make the Most of your Leave

All this being said, there's little point in taking leave if you're not making the most of it. Constantly checking email or tweaking briefs isn't really taking a break, and the people you are spending your time with notice when you're not present. Here are some tips to really and truly step away.

1. Give the office/clients a plan for your leave: If you have a team or an assistant, let them know what to do with inquiries while you are away, whether that be to redirect them to another person or let people know you will address their issues upon your return. If you are solo or work with clients one-on-one, give any important status updates before you leave so they know why they won't be hearing from you.

2. Set your out of office, and don't commit to any more work than necessary: Turn that “I will periodically check email and voicemail” to “I will address any inquiries received while I am out upon my return.” In combination with suggestion 1, this equips people to handle your leave and manages their expectations – which should be all they need from you.

3. Plan Activities and Downtime: Make the most of your leave! Plan activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. This could be a vacation, spending time with loved ones, pursuing hobbies, or simply resting. But, be sure to balance planned activities with unstructured downtime to truly relax and rejuvenate. This helps you return to work feeling refreshed and re-energized.

As a labor and employment attorney, I see firsthand the benefits of taking leave and the protections in place to support it. So, as you consider whether to use those vacation days, remember that your well-being is paramount. Taking a break is not only a right but a necessity for your health, productivity, and overall happiness. Reclaim your rest—you deserve it.



From Adversity to Advocacy: Navigating Life's Challenges on the Road to Legal Excellence

by **Melody N. Wilson**
Law Student

Life's journey is often marked by unexpected twists and turns, challenging our resilience and testing our resolve. For all the triumph that led to my first year of law school, the year also nearly overwhelmed me with tribulations. Though I was undoubtedly tested, overcoming these challenges ultimately led to a newfound sense of purpose and a commitment to sharing my story for the benefit of others.

Last school year, the unimaginable occurred: my mother was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and my boyfriend was tragically killed. Amidst the anguish of personal loss, my academic performance suffered, leading to my dismissal from school for the current academic year. In the depths of despair, I grappled with feelings of shame and self-doubt, asking myself, “did I hear God right?” I mean . . . leaving my hometown of Birmingham, Alabama to pursue my legal studies in Los Angeles, California was not a decision made without much prayer and deliberation.

Yet, amidst the darkness, I discovered a glimmer of hope – a resilience born from adversity. Rather than succumbing to despair, I made a conscious choice to turn my pain into purpose. Through introspection and determination, I embarked on a journey of healing and self-discovery, recognizing the importance of prioritizing mental health and self-care amidst life's storms. I sought professional therapy and psychiatric care to address my emotional well-being.

I reignited my passion for fitness, which played a crucial role in maintaining my mental health. Additionally, I authored two journals focused on dealing with grief and practicing gratitude, which provided me with a therapeutic outlet and helped me navigate my emotions. My spiritual journey also deepened as I strengthened my relationship with God and joined a supportive small group at my church.

Professionally, I honed my legal skills by serving as a litigation clerk and legal assistant for two well-respected firms in Los Angeles. To demonstrate my commitment to continuing my legal education, I engaged a tutor who provided invaluable support and encouragement.

Their assistance was instrumental in my return to school, where I was welcomed back with open arms. I am grateful to resume my studies this upcoming fall with a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm. I have not given up on my dreams of becoming my generation's leading litigator. I will obtain my Juris Doctorate no matter how long it takes.

As I reflect on my journey, I am reminded of the words of Maya Angelou: “I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.” Indeed, while my path may have been filled with challenges, I stand tall, empowered by the knowledge that every trial has the potential to shape us into stronger, more compassionate individuals... or dare I say, better legal advocates.

I also know that I am not alone in having experienced loss and setbacks like these during my legal journey. I urge you to reach out to a young law student or lawyer who may be struggling and check in with them. Let them know how proud you are of them, send them some money for lunch, or simply ask them how they are doing. It's the small acts of kindness that can make a big difference.



My story is not one of failure or impostor syndrome proven correct, but a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. By sharing my struggles openly and authentically, I seek to rewrite the narrative surrounding mental health and dispel the notion that the path to success in the legal profession must be linear. I also hope to inspire others to embrace their own legal, educational, and career journeys, whatever shape they may take, with courage and compassion, knowing that even amidst life's darkest moments, there is hope.

“I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.”

- *Maya Angelou*



Finding the Right In-House Position for You

by **Adrienne Logan**
Vice President & General Counsel, Shutterstock

There is a diverse array of businesses in the world, and the individuals who lead their legal departments are as distinct as the entities they support. The issues a general counsel (for brevity, a “GC”) encounters will vary by industry – the chief legal officer of a global healthcare company will face different regulatory issues than her counterparts at a chain of casinos or an entertainment conglomerate. One constant, however, is the need for the general counsel’s, or really any in-house lawyer’s, skills to align with the focus of the business that they support.

At minimum, a GC must understand the basic components of the business and its industry, and must be sufficiently conversant about the business that they can speak the language of the corporation and its leadership. Below I provide my perspective on structuring a search for an in-house position that allows you to identify companies where you can achieve the alignment necessary to succeed, and position yourself for general counsel, if that is your goal.

“Highly realized people learn to think from the end—that is, they experience what they wish to intend before it shows up in material form.”

- Dr. Wayne Dyer



1. Think about the aspects of business that interest you or are important to you. What industries are of interest to you (e.g., fashion, media, tech, food & beverage)? Do you want to work for a national or global business? Do you prefer working for a large business or a smaller organization? Do you care if the company is a recognized brand or would you rather be part of the growth story for a startup?

2. Think about your ideal work environment. Do you want to work in a large legal department (100+ attorneys), or with a small group of attorneys (less than 5)? Does it matter if your team is located in the same office as you, or in another location (including remote)? Are you willing to relocate? If so, where?

3. Think about your legal practice. Do you want to specialize in a certain area

of the law (e.g., intellectual property, real estate, labor & employment) or would you like to be a generalist? Do you want to directly handle legal issues, or delegate to outside counsel?

4. Consider corporate social responsibility. Does it matter if your company is a leader in social causes and takes a stance on societal issues that is aligned with your values? Does it matter if your company is forward thinking on these issues?

5. Think about what’s best for you. What are your most important considerations when you are thinking about working for an organization? What are your deal breakers?

Working through these questions will help you (1) identify some companies of interest, and (2) drill down on the specific characteristics of a position

I firmly believe that it is important to develop the ability to visualize your destination, and work backwards towards that goal. Think beyond the overall goal of becoming a GC and consider the specifics of your ideal position (e.g., specific company or company type, industry, geographic location, types of legal issues encountered, etc.). These descriptors help to better articulate where you want to go – and let’s be real – increase your chances of getting there.

Here are a few suggestions if you are interested in learning more about becoming a general counsel:

that would interest (and maybe even excite) you.

And once you’ve identified a few target companies, you’re much better positioned to evaluate the legal issues the company faces, its legal leadership structure, and the qualifications you may need to work there (or at similar companies).

For example, if you’ve decided to target food or beverage manufacturers, you’ll likely need an understanding of the FDA and its regulations.

If you are interested in working for a media company, you may need knowledge ranging from the First Amendment to FTC-related matters. A real estate focused organization may require knowledge in everything from debt restructuring to international leases.

With that insight on needed skills and expertise, you can then gather more information to refine target companies that you may be interested in, which provides a great platform to do some research.

Here are some suggestions to assist you in your quest:

1. Familiarize yourself with how companies work:

- a.** Subscribe to the Wall Street Journal, Fortune, Harvard Business Review, and other periodicals that provide insight on the current issues of business organizations.
- b.** Consider taking a business-related class at your local law or business school or online, to better familiarize yourself with the structure of organizations.
- c.** Attend events, webinars, and presentations on relevant areas of business, i.e., supply chain challenges, employee challenges in the modern workplace, like unionization, etc.
- d.** Read books by corporate leaders (e.g., Jack Welch at GE, Howard Schultz at Starbucks, Ursula Burns at Xerox), entrepreneurs, or books that focus on companies (e.g., ‘Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room’, a story of the company’s demise). Don’t exclude leaders of international or smaller organizations. All of this information is relevant to better understand the ebbs and flows in the corporate landscape while exposing you to corporate speak and demystifying it for you.

“The odds of hitting your target go up dramatically when you aim at it.”

- Clinton Mitchell

2. Develop a basic literacy of business finance. Develop an understanding of financial terms, e.g., balance sheet, income statement, and EBITDA. Basic accounting bootcamps are sometimes offered with CLE credit.

3. Tap into your network.

- a.** Do some research among your network to see if you know anyone who can introduce you to someone who is already an attorney with the company or works for the company. Ask for a 10-15-minute meeting to explore some relevant questions after you have done some initial research.
- b.** Check with your network to see if you know any external counsel that works for the company that you are interested in. While external counsel will be limited in terms of some of the information about the company, they can give you a sense of the culture of the company, the leadership of the legal department, impressions of the type of people who work both at the company and in the legal department and the types of litigation, corporate work and external challenges the company handles.

4. Stay current. Follow the companies that you are specifically interested in on LinkedIn and set up news alerts (e.g., Google alerts), which allow you to get real-time updates on significant developments for those organizations.

Being an in-house attorney is certainly within anyone’s grasp. The more that the company where you seek to practice aligns with your interests, your expertise, and your cultural needs, the better your chance of promotion and success.





A Lawyer's Guide to Scheduling Self-Care

by **Hayley Michele Tharpe**
Litigation Associate, Founder of Legally Well

"Self-Care for Lawyers" is seemingly an oxymoron to some. I often hear people express shock and disbelief when they encounter these words on my business signs because they have never heard of such a thing! Unfortunately, I find people are more comfortable engaging with the more familiar concepts of "stress," "anxiety," and "burnout"— especially during periods of overwhelm. Starting today, I encourage you to take a deep breath and begin creating moments where you prioritize **yourself**. Yes, YOU (i.e., the person reading this article)! Below I provide some tips to help make regularly engaging in self-care enjoyable, manageable, and achievable.



Step 1: Identify What Feels Good

First, take out a pen and a piece of paper. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of something that "lights up your spirit" or "sets your heart on fire"? Why? For me, it is yoga! I enjoy yoga for many reasons, including that it allows me to relax any tension in my body and I am able to connect with my inner self. When I first began attending hot yoga classes, I immediately identified that this activity was not only positive for my health, but it also felt good too, i.e., self-care. Self-care is not a monolith. You may not enjoy yoga like I do; but you can still get your heart rate going by jogging, hiking, cycling, raking your front yard, or dancing wildly in your living room. My point being: choose what feels good to YOU.

Understanding the reason something feels good is important because it provides you with the motivation to keep going. A great way to connect with what genuinely makes you feel good is by tapping into your inner child! Meaning, if you had no responsibilities for the day, and were completely well-rested, what would you do? Would you sing? Dance? Garden? Take a moment to reflect on what brings you joy and write it down. Ask your friends and colleagues what they do for self-care, and consider whether their suggestions resonate with you. Reading articles in the BWL Newsletter about self-care may also count as one of those activities too!

Step 2: Ditch the "All or Nothing" Approach

For many of us, the practice of law revolves around two possible outcomes: win or lose. This "all or nothing" approach can spread into other areas of our lives, including when and how to schedule self-care. But wellness is not a concept that is meant to be black and white. It is not a zero-sum game. Rather, think of wellness as a holistic wheel, which encompasses a variety of essential activities, and YOU have the control to engage in what is necessary to fit with your current circumstances. For example, I may realize that I do not have enough time in one day to exercise, wash my hair, and to read a book for thirty minutes as I originally (and ambitiously 😊) planned. But that does not mean all is lost. If there is still time to read the book for even a few minutes that day, I will choose to do so because quiet reading time feels good to me, regardless of the amount of time spent.

When we're feeling anxious or overwhelmed it can sometimes be difficult to assess our true personal capacity, much less make decisions

about what self-care activities fit within our limited bandwidth. That is why listing the activities which allow you to recharge is important: that list gives you a variety of options for self-care at any given moment. If necessary, use that list to administer self-care as your schedule permits. No time for a full in-studio yoga class? Try streaming a shorter class online, or if in the office, doing chair yoga! Can't get outside for a hike as planned? You can still get outside: take a quick stroll around your neighborhood, step out for a call, or if you're truly stuck, open a window. Although things may not go as planned, that does not mean that nothing should happen at all! Try not to allow the inconsistencies of life to discourage you from engaging in self-care. Ditching the "all or nothing" approach will allow you to become more flexible as you integrate self-care into your daily schedule.

Step 3: Map it Out

Most things that we either buy, grow, or build require maintenance. The same can be said for YOU. Engaging in self-care rarely, or even occasionally, is not enough to maintain your overall well-being. Think about it, an extra nap here and there, will not offset regular sleep deprivation. Self-care must become routine; and every routine starts with a plan. Using your list of "feel-goods," and your flexible mindset, the next step is to create a realistic and manageable schedule, which includes your self-care activities. That means calendaring time for self-care, just as you do for work, family, and community obligations. You'll be amazed to see how much you can accomplish for yourself once you make self-care a priority.



Remember that self-care can be as simple as brushing your teeth for a few minutes each day or by blocking a couple of hours off in your schedule for a dentist appointment. Choosing to regularly engage in such self-maintenance, ultimately prevents the possibility of self-destruction, i.e., burnout, later down the line. What will you choose to make time for today?

When you prioritize yourself, you reinforce your personal value. It is the understanding that YOU need to be well, for yourself, and in order to work well amongst others. Going forward, I challenge each reader to go through these steps, as many times as necessary, until you craft the ideal self-care routine. Make the phrase, "Self-Care for Lawyers" your reality starting today!



Real Money for Artificial Intelligence: California State Bar Rule 1.5 and Charging Clients for AI-Completed Legal Work

by **Rosezetta Upshaw**
Award-winning Attorney, BWL Past President and Lifetime Member, Principal at Law Office of Rosezetta Upshaw

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the legal field is revolutionizing how lawyers perform their duties, offering unprecedented efficiency and accuracy in tasks like legal research, document review, and contract analysis. As an IP lawyer, I would be happy to find worthwhile AI software to complete trademark searches and initiate search result analysis, but can we trust it?! These technological advancements bring new ethical considerations regarding everything from confidentiality to reliability, but let's start with the money. How would I charge my clients for the work of an AI "associate?" In California, State Bar Rule 1.5 provides guidance on fees and costs, which is crucial when determining how to charge clients for work performed by AI.

UNDERSTANDING RULE 1.5

California State Bar Rule 1.5 addresses fees for legal services, emphasizing that they must be reasonable. The rule sets forth factors to determine reasonableness, including the time and labor required, the novelty and difficulty of the issues, the skill needed, the fee customarily charged in the locality for similar legal services, and the results obtained. Transparency and fairness are central to this rule, ensuring clients understand what they are being charged for and why.

AI AND BILLING PRACTICES

With AI, lawyers can complete tasks more quickly and often with greater accuracy. However, this efficiency raises questions about traditional billing methods, particularly the billable hour. If AI reduces the time required to complete a task, should clients be billed for less time based on the time saved, or should they be charged a flat fee reflecting the value provided?

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Reasonableness of Fees:

o **Value-Based Flat Fee:** Lawyers can consider adopting value-based flat fee billing methods, reflecting the value provided to the client rather than the time spent. For instance, if an AI tool significantly reduces the time needed for document review but achieves the same or better results, the fee should reflect the value of the outcome rather than just the time saved. While this may seem like a simple solution, some clients may resist flat fees and prefer hourly billing, and there is always a risk that unforeseen circumstances can arise that make flat fee work take significantly longer than expected, even with the help of AI. As a result, many lawyers may feel safer opting for hourly billing even though AI helps save time.

o **Cost Savings:** Charging clients for a full hour of work that was actually completed by AI in 10 minutes would likely be deemed unreasonable under Rule 1.5. Clients who are billed hourly should benefit from the time savings that AI brings. If an AI tool completes a task more quickly, it should result in a lower amount of time billed to the client, assuming the quality of work is maintained. Time spent setting up and prompting AI software for legal work is billable, as is time spent reviewing and revising AI work product.

2. Transparency:

o **Client Communication:** Lawyers must be transparent about their use of AI tools and how it impacts billing. Clients should be informed if AI is used and understand the benefits, such as reduced costs and increased efficiency.

o **Clear Billing Descriptions:** Billing statements should clearly describe the work performed by AI and how the fee was determined, ensuring clients understand what they are paying for.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

Law firms can implement these considerations by developing clear policies for billing AI-completed work. This might include:

- o **Flat Fees for AI Tasks:** Establishing flat fees for tasks typically handled by AI, reflecting the value of the service provided rather than the time spent.
- o **Client Agreements:** Including terms in client agreements that outline how AI will be used and how it will impact billing, ensuring clients consent to and understand these practices.
- o **Regular Review:** Periodically reviewing billing practices to ensure they remain reasonable and align with advancements in AI technology and ethical guidelines.

CONCLUSION

California State Bar Rule 1.5 provides a framework for ensuring that fees charged for legal services are reasonable, which is particularly important in the context of AI-completed work. By focusing on value, maintaining transparency, and avoiding unethical billing practices, lawyers can ethically incorporate AI into their practice. This is still new territory and one piece of advice I always give to lawyers is: when in doubt, call the State Bar Ethics Hotline (800-238-4427). I've found the attorneys on the other end of the line to be friendly, informative and thoroughly helpful. And as far as I know, they are not AI (yet).





Tips for Integrating Movement into Your Self-Care Routine

by **Mychele Sims**

Law Student, Certified Pilates Instructor and Personal Trainer
IG: @get2werk | www.get2werk.com

As a working professional and part-time law school student, I have to find time to plan “Me Time.” One could say that working towards my JD is ultimately for me, but I need something outside of drafting briefs to keep me sane. I preserve my sanity with movement. Let me be candid with you and say that in my “spare time” I am a movement coach and fitness professional. No. This is not a plug. It’s a story laced with some suggestions.

I have worked in some aspect of the law since I was 19 years old. Somewhere around my 40th birthday, I decided to become a fitness professional. I chose movement as an outlet to counter the second-hand trauma I experienced from my job investigating serious felony criminal cases.

Once I got moving, my mental health improved tremendously. I immediately recognized progress in my mood, better energy, better sleep, and improved physical health. Yes, it’s cliché but incorporating movement into your routine can have profound benefits.

Self-care is crucial for maintaining balance and well-being, especially in demanding fields like law. Incorporating fitness into your routine can not only improve your overall health but also enhance your productivity and resilience. Here are some tailored fitness suggestions from a seasoned coach to help us ladies in law strike a balance between mind and body:



1. Establish Boundaries: Set limits on work hours and commitments to maintain a healthy work-life balance. It’s important to prioritize self-care alongside your professional responsibilities.

2. Regular Exercise: Incorporate physical activity into your routine to reduce stress and improve overall well-being. This could be anything from yoga, stretching, cardio, jogging, or even just a brisk walk. Consider taking virtual classes on demand for busy schedules.

3. Set Realistic Goals: Set achievable fitness goals that align with your schedule and lifestyle. Whether it’s aiming to exercise a certain number of days per week, increasing your daily step count, or training for a specific event, setting realistic goals ensures you stay motivated and track your progress effectively.

4. Mindfulness and Meditation: Practice mindfulness and meditation to reduce stress, improve focus, and cultivate inner peace. There are several apps, music services and YouTube that offer guided meditation sessions that can be done anywhere, anytime.

Remember, meditation is practiced in more than one way. Set your focus, honoring the option to move your body or be still.

5. Healthy Eating Habits: Fuel your body with nutritious foods to support your physical and mental health. Prepare healthy meals and snacks in advance to avoid relying on fast food or unhealthy options during busy times.

6. Partner Up: Accountability can be a powerful motivator. Partnering with a friend or colleague who shares your fitness goals can make exercise more enjoyable and help you stay committed. Whether it’s going for walks together, attending fitness classes, or simply checking in with each other’s progress, having a workout buddy can provide encouragement and support.

7. Quality Sleep: Prioritize adequate sleep to recharge your body and mind. Rest is crucial for your body to recover and adapt to the physical demands of work and exercise. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine and create a comfortable sleep environment free from distractions.

~ BE FLEXIBLE ~

This law life can be unpredictable, with fluctuating schedules and unexpected demands. Be flexible with your fitness routine and don’t be too hard on yourself if you miss a workout or deviate from your plan. Remember that self-care is not selfish; it’s essential for maintaining your well-being and performing at your best both personally and professionally. Experiment with different self-care practices to find what works best for you, and make self-care a priority in your daily life.



Crazy Faith

by **Teresa Y. Hillery**

2024 L.A. City Council Primary Candidate

In his book *Crazy Faith*, Michael Todd poses two profound questions about the legacy we leave when we return to our Creator: Will we be remembered as those who professed faith but chose a safe, unremarkable existence? Or as individuals who dared to live life on the edge, placing unwavering trust in God?

This year’s theme, *From Vision to Reality: Dream Big, Push Boundaries, and Make History*, urges us to embody the latter. Take, for example, Mayor Karen Bass, who shattered barriers by becoming the first African American woman to lead the second-largest city in the nation. And consider Vice President Kamala Harris, who made history as the first African American woman to hold the second-highest office in the most influential country globally. Both women pursued positions many said they could never dream of attaining and proved their naysayers wrong.

To live a life characterized by crazy faith is to walk upon raging waters toward a great unknown with confidence in God. It’s an exhilarating way of life.

As aspiring lawyers, we envisioned ourselves joining an esteemed profession. We pursued legal education, passed the bar and, for many, became the first attorneys in our families—turning vision into tangible achievement. We are part of the 3% of Black licensed attorneys in California. Undoubtedly, becoming a licensed attorney in one of the toughest bar-passing states in America required us to push boundaries within ourselves. I’ve embraced faith in God for the seemingly impossible, dared to defy limits, and endeavored to make a lasting impact on history. Before embarking on my legal journey, at the age of 18, I ventured into the corporate world, navigating challenging situations to become the first African American Vice President and Manager of a 10-state Community Development Program at Wells Fargo Bank.

I then moved to downtown Los Angeles and started my legal career as an Associate Attorney at a firm formerly known as Ivie, McNeill & Wyatt. Achieving the milestone of becoming the first attorney in my family was another significant accomplishment. Five years later, I joined Fidelity National Title where I thrived as its Trial Attorney and later its Senior Commercial Underwriter.

Then came the pandemic in 2020, bringing the world to a halt. I’ll never forget that year. Beyond COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd, I was hit by an 18-wheeler on Highway 5. Instead of replacing my totaled vehicle, I began taking public transit and witnessed the heaviness of life shouldered by women, seniors, the disabled, and the unhoused.

In 2023, I retired from Fidelity and ran for the Los Angeles City Council District 14 to help meet the needs of hurting people. District 14 consists of all or part of the neighborhoods in Downtown, Boyle Heights, Eagle Rock, Highland Park, El Sereno, Garvanza, Glassell Park, Lincoln Heights, and Monterey Hills. It has the highest unhoused population in Los Angeles, primarily consisting of African Americans. However, the optics hinted at an unconventional decision. A nonpartisan African American woman, running in a predominantly Hispanic district where the seat has historically been held by Latinos.

Why would someone leave a lucrative six-figure legal position to pursue such a challenge when the odds of success are heavily against them? Answer: Crazy Faith!!!



Running for office demands resilience and determination, revealing your true character and inner strength. The first time I saw “Teresa Y Hillery for Los Angeles City Council 2024” written out, it was surreal. I filed the required documents with the City, opened a campaign business checking account, had a website built, hired a campaign manager and treasurer, and was off and running.

I transitioned from the legal realm into the world of local politics that govern the second largest city in the nation. I shared my dream, vision, and confirmations with my family and closest friends first, then shared as I felt led. The campaign trail was highly stressful and equally exciting. During my daily prayer walks, I expressed gratitude, sought guidance and wisdom, and reaffirmed my belief in love, strength, and clarity of mind and purpose. My faith gave me peace and comfort amidst the nastiness of politics.

Running for my first political office marked the most significant leap of faith in my journey. Despite the uncertainties and hiccups along the way, I held unwavering conviction of my vision of becoming the next city council member for CD14 becoming reality.

Unfortunately, victory eluded me. So, where to now? What’s the next step when even the boldest leaps of faith seem baffling? Answer: Stay focused on God, analyze the many lessons learned, and prepare for the next opportunity to exercise Crazy Faith.

If your dreams and visions lack the element of intimidation, they’re TOO small. Dream big, push boundaries, and let’s continue making history together!!!

(Thank you to all who supported me and my campaign for the Los Angeles City Council. I appreciate you and your support.)





SFFA v. Harvard/UNC: A One-Year Retrospective on the Decision and Its Impact

by **Chalak Richards Guinnes**

Dean of Students, Diversity and Belonging, and Career Development, Pepperdine Caruso School of Law
Senior Associate, Stone | Dean LLP

The following are my reflections on the impact of the case, both from personal and professional perspectives. These do not reflect the views, positions, or decisions of my employer.

There would be very few diversity professionals who were unaffected by the Supreme Court's decision in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. Harvard and UNC*, 600 U.S. ____ (2023). Even before the opinion was released, we began to consider its impact.

I recall speaking on a panel at a law student affairs conference last June, naming the anti-Blackness heard and felt through the arguments, and becoming emotional considering the Black students and colleagues with whom I'd already had conversations about the decision.

In an act of self-care, I decided to take the afternoon off when the opinions were released. On a personal level, I had an almost visceral response of anger and a little despair; one, I believe, that was shared by many Black lawyers, Black academics, and diversity professionals at large.

As I reflected that afternoon, I remembered that I, like many others, arrived where I am because of those who did not stop at despair and who channeled their anger into action. So, like many before me, I rolled up my sleeves and waded back into the fight.

The first step? Encouraging prospective students to apply and present good applications. I served on several town halls this year, spoke to at least one pre-law group a month, and met individually with at least fifty prospective students. All shared the same uncertainty about whether they were permitted to mention their race or ethnicity, particularly in their personal statements.

The answer to that question remains, unequivocally, yes. Nothing in the SFFA opinion precludes the applicant from discussing, in the words of Chief Justice Roberts, "how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration, or otherwise." *Id.* at 39. It was essential that applicants heard that message and were coached through how to so to their advantage.

It was also necessary to consider the message I and others in academia were sending to students of color. SFFA

emboldened many to share unfavorable views on Black and other students of color. I spent a great deal of time this year both showing and telling Black and other students of color that we actually wanted them in the legal profession. That message is not only important but imperative for students to hear, especially when deciding where to pursue their legal education.

The impact SFFA has had on law school or undergraduate applications remains unclear. According to the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC), applications from people of color have risen, with Black applications increasing by 6.4%. We don't yet know how that will translate to actual admissions and matriculations, which is the far more important metric.

What we do know is that we remain in a fight. We've seen news of lawsuits against law firms, corporations, and schools for scholarship and other diversity related programs. Since March, Texas passed SB-117, resulting in the closing of DEI offices at UT-Austin and Dallas; Duke University discontinued a 45 year-old scholarship program for Black students; and, the Wisconsin bar modified a diversity clerkship program. These actions, all based on SFFA, point me towards resolve and the clarion call to channel my anger into action. I hope you will join me.



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P.O. Box 8179
Los Angeles, CA 90008

contact@blackwomenlawyersla.org
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