



## FLORIDA BAR NEWS

# MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION

By Scott Rogers ▶ Special to the News ▶ Columns

June 01, 2018



Lawyers and judges who are introduced to mindfulness, perhaps through a presentation, webinar, or article, or talking with a friend or colleague, often are interested in learning more.

A popular mindfulness training program is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, or “MBSR,” which is perhaps the most widely researched and delivered mindfulness program in the world.

MBSR was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, and first offered in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School to patients dealing with pain, and today is taught to people interested in a range of issues pertaining to physical, emotional, and cognitive health and well-being. MBSR is an eight-week secular mindfulness training that meets 2.5 hours a week and involves a daily home practice of the various mindfulness exercises that are taught and practiced in class.

Earlier this year at a Florida Bar Health and Wellness Town Hall in Gainesville, I met up with trial attorney and former judge, Larry Turner. Larry informed me that he had been practicing meditation for many years and had taken the MBSR class not just once, but twice, because he found it so valuable. Larry generously agreed to spend a little time talking about his experience, and below is a transcription of his comments, maintaining the colloquial nature of our discussion.

### INTEREST IN MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Many years ago, I was introduced to meditation and yoga and found them to be a good way to avoid distraction. My mind didn’t wander as much while practicing them, and I like that. But, as with many things, life got busy. As I got older and settled into my law practice, I recognized that I needed stress relief. I was aware that, like many people in our profession, I was too narrowly focused on the practice of law to the detriment of other areas in my life, including family, friends, and relaxation. I was really enjoying the practice of law, so it was easy to get absorbed, but I also found I was not sleeping well and that I was fatigued as a result, and I became aware of the vicious cycle between lack of sleep and feeling stressed.

So, I knew I needed to deal with that. I did some reading on mindfulness meditation and learned that the University of Florida College of Medicine offered a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program and I thought that sounded just like what the doctor ordered.

#### THE MBSR CLASS

I took the course over eight consecutive weeks and I really liked it. The instructor was smart and knew what she was doing. It was a very interesting group, from students to older people, and everything in between. I came out of that having a greater understanding of what mindfulness is, how to practice and establish a daily routine, and of the ways it can be beneficial.

#### YOUR PERSONAL PRACTICE

I usually practice sitting in a chair or lying down. I enjoy guided meditations and there are many sources online, free and some subscription-based. I often will do a practice that involves paying attention to my breath or listen to a meditation that guides my thoughts in a certain way, perhaps examining aspects of my life, but mainly helping to get me centered, and quiet down the “monkey brain.”

#### HELPFUL IN OTHER WAYS

I feel grateful for having been taught mindfulness. I do not have any difficulty falling asleep. But I am one of those people who wakes up at two or three in the morning with my mind racing, trying to solve all of the world’s problems, in addition to personal problems, and I found it helpful to engage in a disciplined, meditation process. I start by *paying attention to my breathing*, as I count backwards from a thousand. I breath in on 999 and out on 998 and so on, and by paying attention in this way I’ll fall back asleep in a matter of minutes, almost always.

#### MINDFULNESS ON THE BENCH

It is important to take a break during a busy and challenging trial. It doesn’t have to be meditation, but it can be helpful to do something totally different, even if you play solitaire on your computer for a little bit — something to get your mind off of it. For me, I would find a comfortable spot — I had a recliner in my chambers — and after a few minutes of mindfulness practice, I could change my attitude and get back into a healthier space.

#### GUIDED PRACTICES AND BOOKS

I became friends with Michael Singer, who lives near Gainesville and who shared with me his book, *The Untethered Soul*, which I found very helpful. I also enjoyed reading Jon Kabat Zinn's book, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. As for guided practices, I like listening to Tara Brach and Jon Kabat Zinn.

#### CLOSING THOUGHTS

If they'll go to one session, they'll want to go to the second one. The hook will get set early if the instructor is pretty good because you walk out of there seeing that "This is good. This is going to make a difference in how I live and the quality of my life and how I work."

I am deeply grateful to Larry for his time and sharing his experiences, which ring true to me, and I hope are useful to those of you interested in deepening your understanding and practice of mindfulness. There are MBSR classes offered all over the state, often at a reasonable cost.

If you have a question about integrating mindfulness into the practice of law that you would like answered in this column, [send me an email](#).



*Scott Rogers, M.S., J.D., is a nationally recognized leader in the area of mindfulness in law and founded and directs the University of Miami School of Law's Mindfulness in Law Program where he teaches mindful ethics, mindful leadership, mindfulness and negotiation, and mindfulness in law. He is the creator of Jurisight, one of the first CLE programs in the country to integrate mindfulness and neuroscience and conducts workshops and presentations on the role of mindfulness in legal education and across the legal profession. He is author of the recently released, **"The Mindful Law Student: A Mindfulness in Law Practice Guide,"** written for all audiences.*