



WEEK NINE

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness:

conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires.
Oxford English Dictionary

“To be a good lawyer, one has to be a healthy lawyer.”

ABA Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, “The Path to Lawyer Well-Being,”

As recognized by the ABA in its report, the wellbeing of lawyers impacts both their personal and professional lives and, thus, “influences ethics and professionalism” in practice. Under the ABA model rules and the New York Rules of Professional Conduct, lawyers must be competent, diligent, and communicative with their clients. Lawyers also hold affirmative duties to their clients, the courts, other counsel, and even opposing parties. When suffering from untreated addiction, psychological distress, or other health issues, lawyers often fail to meet these obligations or meet them at the further expense of their health and wellness.

The concept of self-awareness is not a new one. It has existed for at least as long as philosophy itself. However, it is now a mainstream concept, and the research confirming the benefits of self-awareness has steadily grown over the past fifty years. Many studies in the 21st century have documented these benefits, including both personal satisfaction and professional success. Today, if you search for materials on self-awareness, you will find a myriad of ideas, definitions, and practices. You will have to choose what works for you and what area to focus on at any given time. In your journey towards self-awareness, remember, it is a life-long practice, not a fixed endpoint.

The idea of self-awareness as a two-prong concept often resonates with law students and lawyers as they face unique stressors in a client-focused, competitive, often trauma-informed, and highly regulated profession. As explained by organizational psychologist Tasha Eurich in the Harvard Business Review, self-awareness encompasses both:

1. Internal Self-Awareness: Understanding our own values, character, strengths, weaknesses, actions and reactions; and
2. External Self-Awareness: Understanding how others perceive us based on self-evaluation, observations, indirect feedback, and direct constructive feedback from a trusted source.

Get started with an **attorney assessment** provided by UB Law’s Career Services Office:



BEGIN THE PROCESS OF SELF- AWARENESS

Ask How and What, not Why.

Psychologists studying self-awareness have found that asking ourselves “why” we do something, think a certain way, or react in a certain way is an ineffective tool.

“Why” questions do not lead to true introspection or self-knowledge, especially as some reasons for our thoughts and behaviors may stem from our unconscious beliefs.

Asking “how” and “what” questions will help us to identify and assess our reactions, whether cognitive, behavioral, or emotional.

These steps can be particularly helpful in professions with ethical obligations to clients who need help, especially when trauma-informed practice is involved.

Here are some tips and helpful questions:

- How did I feel/respond/react when X event occurred?
- Is this how I want to feel/respond/react in this type of situation?
- Does this align with my personal values, beliefs, and aspirations?
- When in a work setting, does this align with my professional obligations and ethical duties?
- What caused me to feel, respond, or react that way?
- What steps can be taken to remove or reduce this behavior?
- Do I need help in changing this behavior or support for my wellbeing?

Note: You can take steps towards self-awareness on your own or with a counselor. No special tools are needed, and you can find resources in books, articles, and online. Check out the resources on the last page of this pamphlet. **If you have self-destructive behaviors that need to be changed, you should reach out for help.** There are free programs to help law students and lawyers. If you need immediate help, call Crisis Services at 716-834-3131.

Wellness Resources

Institute for Wellbeing in the Law
<https://lawyerwellbeing.net/>

Mindfulness in Law Society
Virtual Sits – Free!
www.mindfulnessinlawsociety.org

UB Law Student Affairs
Bernadette Gargano
Vice Dean of Student Affairs
gargano@buffalo.edu
313 and 314 O’Brian Hall

Support for personal and academic issues, course planning, academic requirements, waivers, leaves of absence, and referrals to support services.

**Check out our new website, which compiles
UB Law and University Support and Wellness Resources:**
www.law.buffalo.edu/student-affairs

NYSBA Attorney Well-Being
www.nysba.org/attorney-well-being

Free worksheets, videos, and resources!

NYSBA Lawyer Assistance Program
800.255.0569

Confidential assistance for law students, lawyers, and judges who are struggling with issues such as anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug use, and other conditions.

Erie County Bar Association of WNY
www.eriebar.org/lawyerwellbeing

Join for **free** if you are a law student at:
www.eriebar.org/membercenter

Information about the Member Assistance Program (“MAP”), Lawyers helping Lawyers, and the Committee to Assist Lawyers with Depression.
All are open to law students who enroll in a free membership.

UB Wellness Education Services
716-645-2837
www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/wellness
Check out the “Healthy Decisions” choice to get resources for sleep, healthy eating, or help for alcohol or drug problems.

UB Wellness Coaching – Free!
Health Promotion
716-645-2837
See the Wellness Calendar for free guided meditations, yoga, and more!

UB Counseling Services
716-645-2720
www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/counseling

UB Counseling Services at UB Law
Thom Neill, Licensed Counselor
716-645-2720
Expanded hours coming in mid-February.