

# Opinion: Managing Law School Stress

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SPECIAL TO THE RES IPSA

The world is full of surprises. And sometimes those surprises can be disheartening and worrisome. When you decided to apply to law school you probably did not anticipate today's economic landscape. Surprise!

The world will always be unpredictable and full of unpleasant and pleasant events. We embrace the pleasant and resist the unpleasant – a regular roller-coaster ride. By cultivating greater mindful awareness, you learn to be present for your life just as it is, and enjoy the ride – even when it gets bumpy. In this column, we'll look at the Jurisight® terms "Due Diligence" and "Split in the Circuits" to discuss mindfulness concepts and I'll share with you a simple exercise you can use anytime your mind wanders into anxious territory.

Here's an example. You're eating lunch while watching T.V. A report on unemployment scrolls across the screen. Your heart

skips, your stomach drops, and you look at the sandwich in your hand, all of a sudden not so hungry. The thought crosses your mind "This economy is only going to get worse and I'll never get a decent job." What is the next sound you should be uttering? That's right, "Objection Hearsay!" Just because thoughts arise, doesn't make them true. This is a first step in cultivating mindfulness. After bringing the thought into awareness, it's time to conduct a Due Diligence Inquiry.

In the law, "due diligence" refers to the process of confirming that the representations made during negotiations are true. In Jurisight®, you conduct a due diligence inquiry into your own representations by asking yourself, "Is this true?"

So let's check: Is it true that the economy is only going to get worse? Is it true that you'll never get a decent job? Much of the time, these representations are not very reliable. Often, they are worst-case-scenarios that arise in moments of doubt and fear. By

conducting the due diligence inquiry, you see more clearly the nature of your own mind.

This second step complete, you have more insight, but it may not ease the discomfort flowing through your body. This is a classic example of what Jurisight® calls a "Split in the Circuits." Your emotional circuitry in the brain, found in the limbic system, is shouting "warning" and you may become emotionally flooded with anxiety. Meanwhile, your frontal cortex recognizes that the warning is hearsay and tries to reassure you that everything will be okay. But this cognitive circuit is not communicating so well with the emotional circuit.

Here's a powerful stress reduction technique you can practice when you become agitated. It will tone down the flooding and help resolve the split in the circuits. This "Learned Hand" exercise is called "4-7-8 Hands." You can visit [www.themindfullawyer.com/lhe.html](http://www.themindfullawyer.com/lhe.html) to see a video demonstration. This exercise integrates

breathing and the body as the breath and the hands are synchronized.

Begin with your arms outstretched, your hands in a medium grip. Then, inhale and extend your fingers so they are fully outstretched and you have taken a full breath by the count of four. Keep your hands open and hold your breath to the count of seven. Then, exhale and close your fingers to the count of eight. Do this two to four times when you feel anxious. It is also helpful to practice it during times of ease, as a grounding exercise. Doing so helps disrupt the conditioned neural firings that time and again surface during times of worry. These neural pathways become replaced with more adaptive and healthier ones. You feel better and develop greater clarity for seeing the opportunities that continually present themselves to you.

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