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The ultimate **guide to wellbeing** for lawyers

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Introduction

A career in law can be gratifying, meaningful and rewarding. It can also be stressful, intense and filled with immense pressure. The industry's competitive nature, high workloads and business model predicated on the billable hour is a recipe for burnout and stress.

In this guide, we look at personal and professional wellbeing for lawyers, and give you practical tools and tips to improve your work/life balance, reduce stress and combat burnout.

What is wellbeing?

Health and wellbeing are often used in conjunction with each other, as wellbeing is the state of being healthy and happy. So to really understand wellbeing, we need to understand what it means to be healthy. The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that health is **"a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely absence of disease or infirmity."**

While any rewarding career inevitably comes with some level of unavoidable stress, an abundance can negatively impact your physical and mental health. In a study conducted by Lawcare, 69% of the surveyed legal professionals said they had struggled with their mental health in the past 12 months.

The most common symptoms experienced include:



Research suggests that a lack of employee wellbeing leads to a decline in ethical judgement and decision-making ability - essential attributes for practising law. The impetus to prioritise wellbeing is simple - the healthier and happier you are, the more engaged and productive you are.



What can be done to combat this?

It's clear that wellbeing plays a vital role in both a successful career in law as well as the prosperity of the industry as a whole. There is a lot your employer can (and should) do to help you achieve work/life balance, from encouraging regular breaks during office hours to implementing structured wellbeing programmes. However, ultimately **your wellbeing starts with you**.

But wellbeing isn't just green smoothies and face masks (although those things can certainly help), it's about finding a balance between work and life. As a lawyer you face many external factors outside of your control that can negatively impact your wellbeing, but you can implement methods and practices to help you recognise and manage potential stressors.

3 wellbeing questions to ask your employer

Feeling valued and happy in your job is directly linked to an increase in productivity and an improvement in your physical health. According to the University of Warwick, **people who are happy in their jobs are 12% more productive every single day**.

Most lawyers looking to change roles consider things like pay, job title and the partner track. However, whilst it's clear that employee wellbeing is critical to success, it's often difficult to gauge a company's core values and work/life balance ethos until you're actually an employee.

Here are three questions to ask a future (or current) employer to uncover how important your wellbeing is to them, as well as red flag answers to look out for!





1. Do you have any employee wellbeing programmes in place?

From increasing productivity to reducing stress levels, there are plenty of reasons why companies should implement wellbeing programmes. Asking your (potential) employer if they have any wellness programmes in place can help you establish whether their values align with yours.



Green flag - Employee wellbeing is incredibly important to us. We have a wellness programme that includes health insurance, gym discounts and much more. Mental health is just as important to us and we have several programmes in place to support our employees, such as free counselling services and a flexible work policy to help employees manage their work/life balance.



Red flag - We don't have a specific wellbeing programme in place, but our compensation package is best in class. We also have a concierge service, a hairdresser and free dinner if you're working late, so we provide everything you could need in our office.

While this 'red flag' answer sounds like the company has great perks, it actually suggests that the firm is insourcing certain daily tasks to keep you as close to the office as possible.

2. What personal development opportunities do you offer?

Both employers and employees benefit from personal development opportunities. For the employer, giving their employees the chance to grow within the company leads to a more skilled and highly motivated workforce.

As an employee, personal development enables you to learn new skills and progress in your career. By asking your (potential) employer about personal development opportunities, you can see whether they are committed to investing in their employees.



Green flag - We offer many different personal development opportunities, depending on what you're looking for. We have a mentorship program, as well as an annual training budget that each employee is able to use towards new qualifications or attend conferences.



Red flag - We treat personal development opportunities on a case-by-case basis. Typically our lawyers will put forward a proposal stating why they believe they need to develop, and in what areas. We'll then review each proposal individually, and make a decision on whether we believe the output value aligns with the costs associated.

While it's important for personal development opportunities to align with business needs, treating opportunities on a case-by-case basis displays a lack of equality across the business - meaning some employees will be offered personal development training while others won't.

3. What types of legal technology have you implemented as a firm?

Most roles have their fair share of administrative or repetitive tasks. However, a company that values its employees' time and skillset should be leveraging, and looking to leverage, technology to automate repetitive, unfulfilling tasks. Understanding what technology is in use at a company, and the technology in its roadmap, will assist with surfacing how a company values its employees' time.



Green flag - The technology we use varies depending on each department's needs, but in my team, our lawyers all use Definely Draft to draft and review contracts, and we also have legal case management software in place to streamline processes for both our lawyers and clients. We're always looking for new ways to improve our processes, so we'd love to hear any suggestions you may have.



Red flag - We use Microsoft Teams to communicate, and a few other pieces of tech that we find useful. Generally speaking, our lawyers are pretty happy with the current technology we have in use, so I'd say we're set.

The lack of awareness of the tech used within the team or department shows a clear lack of consideration for technology. Believing they have their tech stack sorted also displays a static mindset that sits in juxtaposition to the evolutionary nature of technology.

Whilst your (potential) employer might not recite the answers verbatim, these questions will help you assess a law firm's commitment to employee wellbeing and whether that law firm is the right fit for you.



7 ways lawyers can de-stress from work

Working long hours, managing overwhelming workloads and dealing with sensitive matters are still as prevalent within law as they ever have been. So, it's no surprise that managing stress levels can feel like a losing battle!

Fortunately, help is at hand. By implementing healthy coping mechanisms for the daily stressors of being a lawyer, you can minimise the toll stress can take on you.

Read on for seven ways to de-stress from work!

1. Prioritise self care

It may sound obvious, but how often do you find yourself prioritising work over all else? This can be a major cause of stress and ultimately leads to burnout. Making time for self care and the activities you enjoy is essential for maintaining your mental health and being able to do your job well.

2. Use meal prep services

If you regularly find your fridge empty after a long day at work and are relying on Deliveroo, chances are you're not getting in your 5-a-day. Eating a balanced diet can reduce the negative effects of stress on your body, improve your mood, and help you to better cope with stress. Consider signing up for a meal prep subscription service to ensure that you are eating healthy, nutritious meals every day.

3. Cut down on caffeine

Evidence shows that moderate caffeine intake increases focus, however, if you're drinking multiple cups of coffee (or energy drinks) every day, it might be time to cut back. Too much caffeine (more than four cups of coffee, according to the NHS) can lead to anxiety, exacerbate stress and drastically affect your sleep. Avoid drinking caffeine after 3pm and consider switching to a decaf alternative for your afternoon pick-me-up.



4. Implement good sleep hygiene

Talking of sleep, getting a good nights kip is an essential component for reducing stress. Not only can a lack of sleep lead to serious health problems, but it can make you irritable, unfocused and less productive. Implementing good sleep hygiene, such as going to bed and waking up at the same time each day (even on weekends) will help on your journey to improve wellbeing.

5. Use your holiday

Lawyers are often guilty of not taking enough time off work. However, research shows that taking regular holidays can improve your health. Whether it's exploring a new country or staycationing at home, holidays allow you to disconnect from work and recharge your batteries. So if you want to reduce your stress levels, make sure you use your holiday allowance!

6. Read for pleasure

One of the simplest ways to disconnect from work is reading (non-law-related) books for pleasure. Reading fiction allows you to take a break from the demands of work, relax your mind and lose yourself in another world. Research has shown that reading can improve memory, creativity, and empathy levels. Pick a book you want to read, not one you feel like you *should* read, and you'll find yourself switching off from work for a while!

7. Talk to someone

If you're struggling with managing stress, talk to a colleague, friend, family member or professional therapist about how it's affecting you. Keeping stress bottled up can have a negative impact on your wellbeing over time. Talking to someone can help you process how you're feeling and often offer helpful insights and advice.

5 tech tools to improve wellbeing

Stress seems to be a normal part of life for many of us, but too much stress can become counterproductive. We obviously can't eliminate stress entirely, but how you think about stress and what you do to tackle it can be the catalyst for prioritising stress management and wellbeing.

Thankfully, the development of technology is here to lend a hand. In the next section of this guide, we share five tech tools to help you improve wellbeing.





Headspace

A lot of lawyers are in a constant state of stress, which can lead to anxiety, depression and burnout. Meditation is a practice that is scientifically proven to improve wellbeing and increase mindfulness. With a plethora of meditations to suit every mood, Headspace offers step-by-step guided meditations for all levels of experience.

Time by Ping

For lawyers, tracking your time is part and parcel of the job. However, it doesn't need to be stressful! Time by Ping uses AI to automate time tracking, making your billable time capture more accurate - no more manually writing your timesheet in the early hours of the morning.

Streaks/Loop

We all have good intentions when it comes to starting new habits, but staying on track when you're a busy lawyer can be a challenge. Whether it's remembering to drink more water, or to get up from your desk every hour, habit tracking apps like *Streaks* for iPhone users and *Loop* for Android users are a great way to hold yourself accountable. Simple to use and fully customisable, sticking to habits has never been so easy!



Reflectly

You've probably heard of journaling, a method proven to be helpful for managing wellbeing and mental health issues. Aside from providing a secure, portable place to jot down your thoughts, Reflectly uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), a tried and tested technique to help you combat ways of thinking that lead to and exacerbate stress and anxiety.

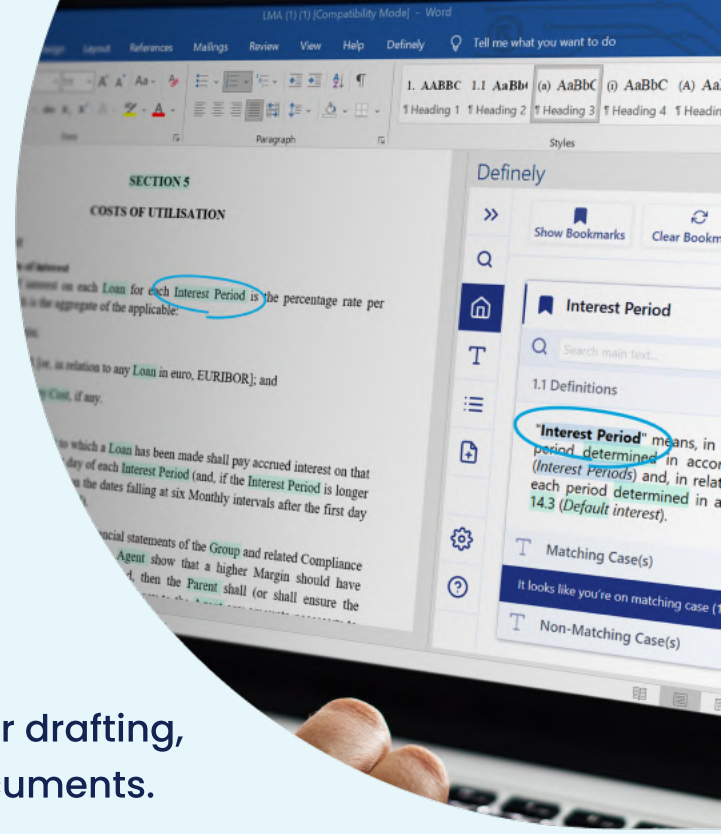
Definely Draft

Lawyers spend much of their day drafting, reviewing and negotiating legal documents - work that can be time-consuming, frustrating and, according to a recent study, hurts employee morale. No more wasting time hunting down definitions and references within your contract. Definely Draft unlocks friction-free legal drafting in MS Word and frees up mental space to focus on the work that matters.

There you have it - 5 pieces of tech to help reduce stress, improve wellbeing and make your life as a lawyer that little bit easier!

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Documents **made simple**



Discover Definely, your one-click tool for drafting, reviewing and understanding legal documents.

Automate the non-billable

Save time hunting down definitions and references and focus on work clients value

Work from anywhere

Enable remote working and remove the need for multiple screens and hard copies

Focus when it counts most

Keep your context and pinpoint information without leaving your provision

Unlock friction-free working

Increase job satisfaction and remove bottlenecks in your organisation

> Running Definely is the first thing I do when opening a contract. Easy to use, intuitive and versatile - I would not want to draft a contract without Definely.



Ben Brooks
Associate at Allen & Overy
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