

**Lawyer Well-being: Tools to Thrive**  
Law Society of Saskatchewan  
Practice Management Session  
June 2, 2023  
Alanna E. Carlson, BA, JD  
Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission  
founder of [the parasympathetic pig](#)

The most important part of your practice is YOU. Your personal well-being is key to a flourishing career in law. In this presentation, Alanna Carlson will share her story of recovery from chronic illness, explore barriers to health and success in practice (hello perfectionists!) and provide practical tools, skills, and resources that you can use to reduce stress and build well-being. No yoga or meditation required!

<https://www.lawsociety.sk.ca/event/virtual-seminar-your-legal-practice-skills-to-thrive-cpd-360/>

This session is a crash course in what I learned during two years of chronic illness. You may have encountered my story of Long COVID on [CBC News](#) or [CBC Radio](#). What I learned the hard way can help others who are experiencing **burnout, anxious thoughts, depressed affect, and chronic pain**. While I was ill, I started writing and [designing resources](#) to help myself, and now I share those with others in a project I call [The Parasympathetic Pig](#).

### **Lawyers are predisposed to depression, anxiety, and burnout.**

- The job comes with a lot of pressure and stress (both external and self-imposed)
- We are prone to perfectionistic thinking, people-pleasing (not being able to say no), and overachieving.
- Lack of healthy coping mechanisms or supports, restorative rest, and sleep

Our modern-day predators like email activate fight, flight, or freeze responses (remember the mouse metaphor).

Your brain and nervous system protect you from overwhelming stress the best way it knows how, and this process can create all kinds of symptoms. See: the [cause of chronic illness and path to recovery](#).

### **We can create more health resiliency - three ways**

- 1. Self-compassion (as an antidote to perfectionism)**
  - [Perfectionism](#) is a form of self-loathing or self-destruction
  - Treat yourself with kindness, encouragement, and non-judgment like you would with a friend or child. How can you lower the stakes and criticism?
  
- 2. helpful or flexible thinking (as an antidote to unhelpful thinking patterns)**
  - Acknowledging [cognitive distortions](#) and coaching your thoughts to be more neutral, flexible, and helpful using the thought ladder technique
  - Positive affirmations do not work unless you actually believe them

### 3. Somatics (as an antidote for trauma response to stress)

- Present moment awareness, slow nasal breathing, [vagus nerve stimulation](#)
- Ask yourself: I wonder what my next thought will be?

#### How to put it all together

Through my review of this topic and my own lived experience, I have noticed a specific order of events for these tools to be truly effective. In order to move from a [stress response to a feeling of safety and engagement](#), we start with:

1. **Movement** (shake, walk, dance, run, workout)
2. **Breathe out slowly** through the nose
3. **Connect to the body** and the present moment
4. **Acknowledge your thoughts** and **coach yourself** to engage in believable helpful + flexible thinking

**Be gentle with yourself** - bringing intensity and achiever-attitude will not help you here!

#### Learning more

I compiled a helpful [list of recommended books, podcasts, and accounts](#) on these topics. This is a good place to start learning more.

I am also able to connect you with a resource (free or subscription) in an area that you are curious about. When you contact me, fill in the rest of this sentence:

- I would like to learn more about \_\_\_\_\_ (vagus nerve, perfectionism, trauma responses)
- I would like to feel more \_\_\_\_\_ (present, peaceful, aware, rested, etc)
- I want to stop \_\_\_\_\_ (self-sabotage, self-criticism, feeling anxious, etc)

Please also include any preferences you have regarding format for the resources, i.e., if you don't have social media, or if you don't like podcasts.

By Alanna E. Carlson, [the parasympathetic pig](#)  
[alanna.carlson@gov.sk.ca](mailto:alanna.carlson@gov.sk.ca)