

Bye To Bad Habits: Lawyers Share Resolutions For 2020

By **Erin Coe**

Law360 (January 24, 2020, 3:43 PM EST) -- Hitting the snooze button instead of the gym. Letting that attorney's email get under your skin. Checking your smartphone nonstop. Skipping a couple hours of sleep to finish that brief.

The never-ending demands of the legal industry can make it easy for lawyers to slip into some bad habits, and there's nothing like a new year to take stock and look for ways to reset.

Lawyers told Law360 they are settling into the year with an optimistic outlook and have a whole host of personal and professional goals they're hoping to achieve.

Here, attorneys share the resolutions they're most excited about for 2020.

Make Each Moment Count

Many lawyers said they are looking to be more focused with their time, be smarter about how they work and be mindful of savoring the moments they have.

Tye Gonser, a corporate lawyer at Weinberg Gonser LLP in Los Angeles, said he's seeking to be more present this year. While it's satisfying to get a lot done at once by multitasking, there also are negative aspects Gonser has noticed, like when he's been on a conference call while trying to send an email or planning what he's going to do after the call.

"I realize that it's not fair to myself or the other person on the call, and I should focus on getting the most out of that experience," he said. "My goal is to work on a continual basis to be more present in whatever moment I'm in, with whoever I'm with and with whatever I'm working on."

This year, Jason Winslow, a partner in Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP's health care practice in Belleville, Illinois, intends to rein in his around-the-clock technology use. His plan is to turn off his phone's email notification buzzer while at work and to handle emails in batches at certain times during the day rather than on a piecemeal basis. And when he's at home on weeknights, he's trying to keep his phone out of sight until his 2-year-old daughter goes to bed.

"I'm trying to get my cell phone out of my hands 24 hours a day," he said. "It's an efficient way of communicating, but if I'm not careful, it can snowball."

Meanwhile, Cassandra McLaughlin, a commercial real estate partner at Bell Nunnally & Martin LLP in Dallas, is aiming to perfect the art of saying "no." Instead of reflexively signing up for a personal or professional undertaking out of a sense of obligation or guilt, she wants to be better in 2020 about limiting her time to the most important and pressing matters.

"Learning to say 'no' more often may prove a challenge, and it may also be quite liberating," she said. "A simple exercise when it comes to the myriad of events attorneys are asked to attend is to ask, 'Would I want to go to this if I had to do it now versus tomorrow, next week, next month?' If the answer is 'no,' then I say 'no' and leave my time open for more productive activities."

For Scott O'Connell, head of Nixon Peabody LLP's litigation department, this year's resolution is to live fully in the moment and be engaged in every professional and personal interaction.

"2020 is about focusing on the daily journey and not some distant, unattainable end," said O'Connell, who is based in Boston and Manchester, New Hampshire. "To attain this, I need to work on establishing boundaries and strategies to minimize distraction and maximize focus. I need to unplug from technology regularly, put the phone on 'Do Not Disturb' and give my complete attention to [the] interaction or project at hand."

Stop Overlooking Your Health

Michelle De Blasi, a director in Fennemore Craig PC's natural resources, energy and environmental law group, said she began taking a closer look at her lifestyle choices a few years ago. On top of her busy practice, De Blasi runs a

nonprofit in Arizona connecting energy businesses, utilities and regulators, and is a single mother of two daughters, 11 and 13.

"As a lawyer, it's easy to fall into a pattern where you're not eating regularly or sticking to a healthy diet," she said. "You sit at your desk, you skip breakfast and lunch, you live on caffeine, you're trying to manage the stress."

For the last several years, she has been committed to prioritizing her health, hiking trails in the Grand Canyon twice a year and participating in grueling trail runs to stay physically fit and clear her mind. And this year, she wants to add another piece to her overall health goal: get more sleep. She admits that it's often the first thing to be sacrificed after a hectic day.

"My biggest goal is to really be more disciplined about getting to sleep earlier," De Blasi said. "I'm trying to get at least seven hours a day — and eight would be incredible."

Matt Addison, managing partner of McDonald Carano LLP's Reno, Nevada, office, wants to be more conscientious about how he disengages from work. Whether he's doing martial arts, practicing yoga, meditating or reading, he wants to ensure he's absorbed in the activity in front of him and affording himself a real break from work, so that when he returns, he's recharged.

"Last year, I'd been so busy with work and management duties, I was just trying to tread water," he said. "There are real ramifications if you don't take care of yourself. ... You have to be smarter, and it's an everyday thing."

Let It Go

For her 2020 resolution, Stacie Collier, a partner in Nixon Peabody's labor and employment group in Providence and Boston and part of the firm's management committee, plans to work on acceptance — changing what she can while being grateful for what she has.

"As litigators, we want to be perfect," she said. "I work so hard and try to plan for everything, but the reality is that whether it's life or work, it works out the way it works out."

Nixon Peabody was among the first law firms in 2018 to sign on to the American Bar Association pledge to improve lawyer mental health and well-being, and since Collier is actively involved in that campaign, she thinks she will be an even better role model if she can take a step back, look at the bigger picture and let go of some of her perfectionism.

"It doesn't mean I don't want to deliver a great work product or get great results, but I have to put away the cudgel when something doesn't go the way I plan it to or the way I think it should have," she said. "I need to build some acceptance around that."

Develop Relationships

Other attorneys told Law360 they want to strengthen ties with their colleagues and communities.

Wayne Risoli, a longtime leader of Houston-based Chamberlain Hrdlicka White Williams & Aughtry who became chairman emeritus this year, is already planning a number of trips across the country to mentor attorneys at the 132-lawyer firm and help them take their careers to the next level.

Suzanne Jones, an insurance partner in Hinshaw's Minneapolis office, is looking to return to one of her early passions — community service.

Gwendolyn Payton, a complex commercial litigator in Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP's Seattle and Anchorage offices and a mother of two teenagers, tries to use every minute at work productively, but she's noticed that it leaves her with little time to get to know people in her office. Her resolution this year is to take a few minutes every day to make a real, human connection with someone at her firm, she said.

"It doesn't have to be major, maybe just a short conversation about the weekend or a question about how their kids are doing," she said. "I've also written a few cards to thank people who went out of their way for our clients and taken the time to acknowledge birthdays and anniversaries. I've been doing it for a few weeks now and the results are magical."

The Time to Dance Is Now!

Christy Tosh Crider, chair of Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz PC's health care litigation group in Nashville, has a "Joy Plan" that calls for more dancing, and not just any kind — "free-style, like no one is watching, dancing."

"It's impossible to be stressed, a helicopter parent, multitasking, not present in the moment, or a host of other things that I need to work on when dancing," she said. "There are dozens of other goals [or] resolutions on my Joy

Plan, but the one that involves Joan Jett and Lizzo is the one about which I am most excited.”

--Editing by Pamela Wilkinson and Marygrace Murphy.