

Lawyers and intimacy

I suspect what some of you may be thinking and, no, this column is not about sex. It is about how we, as lawyers, have characteristics that stand us in good stead for our profession but, at the same time, these same attributes can interfere with our emotional relationships.

In researching this article, I read a book titled *Should You Marry a Lawyer? A Couple's Guide to Balancing Work, Love & Ambition* by Fiona Travis. Before I hear the chorus of yeas and nays, I want to talk about what makes us lawyers and what we can do to make us relationship-sensitive.

Lawyers are perfectionists. We spend a great deal of our time in lawyering tasks - drafting documents, checking out land titles, cross-examining, docketing, etc. We want it done right. These tasks are measures of our competence and self-worth.

We need control. It is sometimes hard to delegate and trust that the work will be done to our high standard when our name and reputation are on it. We think we can control how others do our work, at what pace and according to our priorities.

We are conscientious. We return phone calls within a day. impossible. We organize our files according to our personal system. We do things according to our private logic to make our world less stressful.

We started in law school trying to read everything assigned even though that was impossible. In practice, we rise to the challenge of emergencies by working late or on weekends. We defer or cut out completely time for ourselves.

We need approval. The payment of fees is great but that thank you call, pat on the back or letter

of appreciation is really welcome. We are ready to justify our actions and try hard to achieve what we need internally to give ourselves our own self-approval. All these things make us good if not great lawyers. But can you see how these traits might be relationship killers? Doing everything perfect at home is impossible. Not putting your skills away when you get home might have you cross-examining your partner or kids. Constant lists of tasks to be done take away spontaneity. Trying to control how your family acts can lead to tension and conflict when you tell them you know best how to do things. Expecting your partner or family to conduct their lives as you do is unrealistic. To delay gratification by missing holidays or taking your laptop, BlackBerry and files on holidays kills the mood (that's an understatement!). Expecting constant praise or affirmation from your partner or family is a one-way emotional street and will just not happen.

So, I've beat us up pretty badly, but I've tried to be realistic about what happens sometimes to our relationships in our busy, fast-paced lives.

But, we can do things to promote intimacy with those we love. They are not hard in principle but can be very difficult in practice. Here goes.

Learn to laugh at life and yourself. Realize that you are not the king/queen of the world. Some situations will just not work out as you want. Set up boundaries. Establish an end of day time (and stick to it). Prioritize your needs at work. When you walk out of the office, shut your lawyer brain-functioning off. Go to your kids' sporting events and school activities. Go to dinner with your

partner at least a few times a week. When you delegate, get the information you need to let it go -how the assigned task will be performed, when it will be done and set a time for a progress report. Go on holiday for at least two weeks in a row and leave your gadgets of communication at home. Don't leave a number where you can be reached. Then, let it go. Call your mother and father. Eat three meals a day. Get eight hours of sleep a night. Exercise for at least half an hour three times a week. Cut down or cut out caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. Drink lots of water. Learn to meditate. Find a hobby that is a passion. Love yourself.

When it comes to intimacy, it involves making room in your life for someone else. Nurture a relationship. Do something for no reason at all except out of love or friendship. Laugh a lot. Give hugs. Talk to that important person in your life two or three times a day to maybe just say hello or maybe for the support to keep going. Give yourself credit for who you are.

There were two lessons I got from that book *Should You Marry a Lawyer?* The first was that, before entering into a relationship with a lawyer, do your due diligence about where they are with intimacy. The second lesson was to always buy travel insurance!

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