

The S.L.O.W. Sunday: A Weekly Reset for Legal Professionals That Can Help Set Up a Better Week

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Today is World Mental Health Day, not only an important day to talk about mental health, but also a valuable opportunity to think about how to protect it as we structure our ordinary days. This concept is especially meaningful to legal professionals for whom stress is often a constant undercurrent of daily life. There is always another deadline, another email, another client in need, or another problem to solve.

If you have ever noticed your mood worsening as Sunday afternoon turns into Sunday evening, you are not alone. There is even a name for that anxious feeling many people experience as the weekend winds down: the “Sunday scaries.”

At some point on Sunday, Monday starts creeping in. You think about the meeting you have first thing in the morning, the project that is behind schedule, the difficult conversation you need to have. Before you know it, you are mentally at work well before the weekend is over and you end up not sleeping well Sunday



night. As a result, you start the week off tired instead of refreshed.

So on this special day, I have a practical suggestion for legal professionals: rethink Sunday. Try not to let Sunday devolve into the day you spend dreading Monday. When possible, use it deliberately to set yourself up for a better week by having a S.L.O.W. Sunday: a day for Self-care, Leisure, Outreach, and a bit of Work.

The proportions and activities will be different for everyone, but incorporating some of each can make Sunday restorative and the rest of the week a little easier. Taking time on Sunday to do something for your body, to have

some fun, to connect with others, and to do just enough preparation to quiet some of the mental chatter about the week ahead will not eliminate Monday's demands, but it will help you meet them on better terms.

Self-Care

If possible, it is always helpful to begin Sunday with self-care. That might mean exercising, getting outdoors, taking a walk, stretching, meditating, prepping healthy meals or getting some extra sleep. Or it might mean doing absolutely nothing for a while. We sometimes make self-care more complicated than it needs to be. Self-care is not only possible at a wellness retreat or with fancy equipment. The point of self-care is to do whatever helps you feel physically and mentally restored.

Mental well-being is often supported by ordinary healthy behaviors practiced consistently. Sunday is an opportunity to engage in some of them. Legal professionals are trained to respond to other people's needs. Sunday is a good time to put yourself somewhere on that list.

And rest assured, there is nothing selfish about self-care because taking care of your own well-being gives you the energy, resilience, and capacity to meet your responsibilities and show up fully for others including the family members, friends, clients, and colleagues who depend on you.

Leisure

An ideal Sunday also makes room for some pure leisure-time that takes your mind completely off of work. Watch a movie, cook, or garden. Go to a museum. Listen to music.

Attend a concert or sporting event. Work on a hobby that absorbs you until you lose track

of time. Read something that has absolutely nothing to do with the legal profession.

Legal professionals spend enormous amounts of time doing things that have to be done. Leisure lets us do the things we want to do; it allows us to have fun and experience joy. And it restores us because it gives our mind and body a chance to disengage from demands, replenish energy, and return to our work tasks with greater clarity and resilience. Leisure also reminds us that there are sources of engagement, curiosity, and pleasure outside of work. Consequently, enjoying part of Sunday is in itself a worthwhile use of the day.

Outreach

Sunday is also an opportune day to strengthen the relationships in your life, particularly those that become even harder to maintain during a busy workweek. Call a parent. Text a friend and make plans to get together. Spend uninterrupted time with your spouse, partner, kids, or other loved ones.

Legal work can be surprisingly isolating, even for people who spend their days surrounded by colleagues and clients. Indeed, much of our professional interactions are transactional: what needs to be done and by when.

The AI transformation has the potential to make the profession even more isolating by tying us further to our screens. But the value of social connection cannot be emphasized enough. As the Harvard Study of Adult Development (one of the longest longitudinal studies of human life) has found and many others have supported, the quality of our relationships is the strongest predictor of both happiness and long-term health.

During a busy week, relationships can easily become something we intend to get to later. Then suddenly the week has gone by without our having paid any real attention to them. Sunday gives us a prime chance to be intentional about staying connected to the people who matter to us.

Work

This may sound like odd advice in an article about mental health, but I think it is perfectly acceptable and frequently beneficial to do some work-related tasks on Sunday—if doing it will make your week feel better not worse. I am not talking about spending Sunday afternoon billing five hours or getting a head start simply because you feel guilty that you are not working. I am referring to a limited amount of purposeful preparation.

Look at your calendar. Identify the two or three things that matter most in the coming week and what the pressure points are likely to be. Make a to do list. Deal with one small task that has been hanging over your head. Draft an email to send tomorrow (refrain from sending it out on Sunday though unless it is pressing or the recipient expects to hear from you as soon as possible!).

A small amount of Sunday preparation can reduce Monday-morning friction since you have already given some thought to how you want the week to unfold and are not walking into Monday completely cold. The week will still bring surprises: legal work always does. But in a

profession in which so much of our time is dictated by other people's priorities, that little bit of control can feel surprisingly good.

World Mental Health Day is not only a day to discuss serious mental health challenges and the importance of seeking appropriate help and support. It is reminder that we all have to look after our mental health every day—and that there are things we can do regularly to help protect it. We should not wait until we are overwhelmed or struggling to pay attention to our health.

Sometimes supporting our mental health means looking at the ordinary rhythms of our lives and asking whether we can make them work more favorably for us. Sunday is a good place to start.

So when your schedule allows, consider experimenting with your own version of a Sunday reset that allows for some healthy self-care, leisure, connection, and work-preparation: in other words, a restorative S.L.O.W. Sunday. Not every Sunday can be a S.L.O.W. one.

There will be weddings, birthday parties, travel soccer games, business trips, and other work and family obligations that interfere with that plan—even more reason to savor each S.L.O.W. Sunday you get to experience. On this World Mental Health Day, I wish you all many S.L.O.W. Sundays in the year ahead.

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