Collin Walke for Oklahoma Bar Journal | When Inns of Court, Mindfulness and Our Obligations Intersect

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She was a homeless 14-year-old living at a shelter. After sitting through a 45-minute class on mindfulness with only a few outbursts, she asked if she could speak with me when we were done. After the supervisor assented and walked out of the room, the young lady began to tell me of the abuse she had experienced at the hands of her parents. It was an absolutely horrific account of something none of us should ever have to live through. And yet, here was a young teenager who should have been out experiencing the world and instead was experiencing years of trauma.

This chance encounter was a result of a local nonprofit tour sponsored by the Ruth Bader Ginsburg American Inn of Court, of which I have been a member for more than a decade. Each year, our inn collects donations for charities, and this year, our chosen organization was a local nonprofit that houses homeless youth. When we dropped off our donations, the executive director gave us a tour and added at the end, "We're always looking for volunteers."

I started publicly preaching the benefits of mindfulness in 2019 after training for nearly 20 years. While I had worked with traumatized participants before, they were all adults. I had never considered offering such training to youths. To be fair, this was due in part to the fact that mindfulness requires a certain amount of discipline that many young people lack – or at least I did at that age (my teacher has been a monk since he was 11, so obviously, I may have been the problem).

Sure enough, after I had called to suggest the possibility of spending the summer working with their youth, the counselor advised, "We'd be happy to try, but we've tried that before, and it didn't work very well. These aren't the type of children who sit still well."

"Aha! Not a problem at all!" I responded. You see, many people confuse mindfulness with meditation. They are not the same thing. Moreover, many people are under the misconception that meditation is required to be mindful. It's not. Meditation just helps us to learn to be mindful. And so I was able to spend this past summer working with 8-14 youths every week on mindfulness – and the longest they ever spent "meditating" was five minutes (and they did it quite well, I might add).

My point is the world is hungry for our gifts and skills, whatever they may be. Inns of court are fantastic ways to share our unique bailiwicks with our colleagues, but we can't forget that our sphere of influence doesn't end at the courthouse. So the next time your inn gets involved with an organization that has a need, don't hesitate to reach out and see what you can do to be part of the solution.

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