

Sources Revealed | Trish Weaver

Meditating on mediation

Meditation aficionado and Paley Rothman partner Trish Weaver, who also happens to be president-elect of the Montgomery County Bar Association, meditates on the future of her profession and maintaining that ever-elusive work-life balance. Interview by Melissa Castro



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You majored in psychology at the University of Maryland. What drew you away from that and into law? I got into psychology because I wanted to know why people act as they do and what motivates them. But, along the way, I had a child while I was still in college. I quickly learned that pursuing that Ph.D. was going to make it very difficult to provide for my son as a single mom.

Do you draw on the psychology training as a lawyer specializing in mediation and appellate litigation? Absolutely. There's no question. It's all about understanding what motivates a person, what their perspective is, how they receive and interpret information. That helps on the litigation side when you're trying to create a compelling argument for the judge or the jury. But particularly on the mediation side, if you can pull back the layers and uncover what is really driving the dispute — the underlying motivating principles and concerns — that can be key to resolving the dispute.

What's the single-most misunderstood motivator? People always think it's about the money. But there are usually other things in play too. There often are misunderstandings that happen along the way, and over time the parties just kind of create these layers of perceptions about the other party, and all of their actions are then seen through that filter. If you bring people to a table and have them talk candidly, they often find that their assumptions are wrong — and that, in itself, can create a space to get things resolved.

What would you like to accomplish as president of the Montgomery County Bar Association? I'd like to combat all of that negativity out there about lawyers. I mean, I'm in meditation groups and volunteer groups, and so I meet a lot of people. And, despite all the lawyers-as-shark jokes, the members of the Montgomery County bar are among the finest people I've ever met.

You mediate and meditate. Tell me about meditation? Like it or not, your mind is constantly working at every moment. You're thinking about what you did yesterday and what you're supposed to do tomorrow, and very often you're not tuned in to what's going on right here, right now. So meditation is really aimed at having you lose that mind chatter by just focusing your entire attention on your breathing. Because that is the one thing that is present, and is here and is now.

How does meditation play into your professional life? If I'm involved in a particularly contentious case, it helps me just to take a deep breath and not jump on that truck heading on a collision course when the other side suddenly barrages you with a request for another 2,000 documents.

Is there any other specific thing you'd like to accomplish at the bar association? Part of what I want to do is encourage more people to use alternative dispute resolution mech-

anisms to spare some of the financial and emotional costs of litigation.

How do you see the bar promoting that? This "collaborative law" thing has already taken hold in the domestic arena, but it could gain more ground in estate litigation and commercial litigation — both of which are emotionally charged areas.

You've been at Paley Rothman for 16 out of your 17 years as a lawyer. Why did you choose that firm? Because of the great balance of quality work and quality of life. I had clerked there during law school and just knew from that experience it was the place for me — people actually had lives.

So "quality of life" wasn't just a marketing slogan? Here it's actually true.

What was the billable hours requirement when you joined in 1993?



1,600 hours [per year].

Video

Paley Rothman partner Trish Weaver discusses mediation's emotional and financial cost savings. [washingtonbusinessjournal.com](http://www.washingtonbusinessjournal.com)

What is it now? 1,600 hours.

Oh. My. God. There are different levels of compensation for higher hours, but that's the minimum. Our firm really values the balance of life and work.

So what do you do with the "balance" of your time? I spent a lot of time with my son, who's now 24, and my family. We have three generations of water-skiers in the family. My parents started skiing together on the Gulf of Mexico when they were newlyweds. Now, my parents and I both have lake houses on the same cove on Lake Gaston, N.C.

What else do you do for fun? My partner, Mike — also a lawyer — and I do a lot of outdoor stuff, like hiking. We spent five days in the Teton wilderness last summer on a guided horseback tour. We're going to do it again next summer, but this time Mike and I are just going to hike in on foot on our own, and bring everything on our backs. We're going to do a dry run in the Shenandoahs on Nov. 7, to test out the new gear.

That's going to be cold. Why would you want to do that? Because we can.

Are you scared to go out there to Wyoming-or-wherever alone? The first go-around, I told this friend of mine that we were going out there, and he said "You know, there are a lot of grizzly bears out there — what's your bear plan?" Mike was the one really driving this train, so that night I went home to Mike and said, "Hey Mike, what's our bear plan?" He looked at me and said, "Well, my bear plan is that I don't need to outrun the bear, I just need to outrun you." I think we need to go to Plan B.