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Rethinking the Legal Profession

a collaborative journal and catalyst for positive change

Confessions of an adrenaline addict and trial lawyer

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“Hello, my name is Melody and I’m an adrenaline addict.”

That’s right. This 47-year-old, clean living vegetarian, who has never consumed an illicit drug, never smoked a cigarette, and almost never drinks alcohol, is hooked to the “high” generated by the stressful activity of being a trial lawyer. Hooked to the point of increasing detriment to my health and well-being.

If I were addicted to alcohol, painkillers, cocaine, any number of other substances, friends and family would long ago have staged an intervention and shipped me off to rehab. But I’m a functioning member of society and my addiction to the high-stress world of high stakes litigation is a job requirement for me, a mandatory ingredient to the package of services that I offer my clients. It helps them win cases. My addiction is my means of earning a living.

Why am I blogging about this here rather than running off to an adrenaline addiction treatment center? Simple. Because adrenaline and its effects is the crushing elephant in the room of every courthouse across the country. Lawyers strung out on adrenaline are crowding our courtrooms with lawsuits that never end, disputes that never get resolved, because those entrusted to handle them have a compulsive need to continue the fight-or-flight hormone rush within their own bodies. It needs to be discussed.

No one teaches young lawyers about the physiological effects of day-to-day lawyering. As to adrenalin addiction and lawyers, a google search only revealed a [single blog article](http://reallifeppractice.com/2011/01/are-you-an-adrenaline-addict/) (<http://reallifeppractice.com/2011/01/are-you-an-adrenaline-addict/>) on the topic with little response.

Lawyers need to understand the effects that adrenaline have on them and how it affects their interaction with the legal profession, and ultimately society at large.

Fortunately, I have found another source of training about adrenalin response and management outside of the legal field, namely the [FAST Defense \(www.fastdefense.com\)](http://www.fastdefense.com) program founded by Bill Kipp, a 5th degree black belt and former U.S. Marine. FAST Defense is adrenal stress response training. This scenario based training helps you understand your own body’s reaction to the rush of adrenaline and teaches you how to maintain the appropriate balance between the extremes of passivity and aggression.

When I first took the class I was stunned at the comparisons between the self-defense scenarios we worked on with and my daily work activities of appearing in court and at depositions. The feeling of the adrenaline rush inside my body was identical, and, frankly, a little scary when I thought about it.

My instinctive desire to run across the room and put my hands around the throat of the instructor that was taunting me (for the purpose of increasing my adrenalin) was much like the desire to wring the neck of a disrespectful lawyer on the other side of the table at a rancorous deposition. Although these classes are

often taught to law enforcement and military personnel, they are also available to anyone who wants to better understand their own interactions with conflicts that arise in the real world, even within the confines of courtrooms.

I have already begun to incorporate my FAST Defense training into my law practice with positive results and encourage other trial lawyers to do the same. Bill Kipp, FAST Defense founder and Black Belt Magazine's 2012 Self Defense Instructor of the Year, will be in Southern California this coming weekend teaching FAST Defense classes in San Diego, hosted by [Family Karate PQ \(http://familykaratepq.com/2013/03/bill-kipp-to-teach-fast-defense/\)](http://familykaratepq.com/2013/03/bill-kipp-to-teach-fast-defense/).

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[Diana Bartolotta](#)

[March 13, 2013](#)

“Lawyers need to understand the effects that adrenaline have on them and how it affects their interaction with the legal profession, and ultimately society at large.”

Interesting....you make an excellent point. I'd love to see some studies on this.

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