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Maslon partner Wayne Moskowitz is president of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center's board. "The skills you learn from meditation can be really good for lawyers," said Moskowitz, shown at the center in Minneapolis. Staff photo: Bill Klotz

Meditation workshop could carry valuable lessons for lawyers

By: Dan Heilman March 17, 2016 0

The practice of law is an intense, competitive, sometimes nasty business. You might know that all that negativity isn't good for you personally, but have you ever wondered whether it's bad for your practice?

A workshop being held Friday in Minneapolis is aimed at helping attorneys (and others) better deal with the unhealthy circumstances they face daily. "Eight Mindfulness Practices for Effective Leadership," a one-day workshop hosted by the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, will take place on March 25 at the Opus College of Business on the Minneapolis campus of St. Thomas University. The workshop will feature Norman Fischer, one of the founding designers of Google's Search Inside Yourself program, which to help people who work in a corporate setting develop emotional intelligence based on mindfulness.

The workshop is co-sponsored by, among others, Maslon LLP, Nilan Johnson Lewis and Fredrikson & Byron, and as it turns out, Maslon partner Wayne Moskowitz is president of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center's board.

"I started meditating in the early 1990s," said Moskowitz. "I was always interested in it, but never had an opportunity to learn about it. I asked around for a good teacher, and it turned out that a Japanese Zen master working near where I live."

Moskowitz said that the workshop will be a source for learning techniques of mindfulness that can be essential tools for harried professionals such as attorneys.

"The skills you learn from meditation can be really good for lawyers," he said. "We're dealing with conflict, anger, greed — all these unhealthy emotions. Meditation is a way to deal with those emotions and be effective when you're in the middle of them. You don't have to be reactive — you can be happy and calm in the midst of the craziness of being a lawyer."



Maslon partner Wayne Moskowitz rings a bell made from the shell of a bomb at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. "I started meditating in the early 1990s," said Moskowitz. Staff photo: Bill Klotz

Listen up

Tim Burkett, the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center's guiding teacher, has family members who are lawyers, and he agreed that the lessons of meditation can be as valuable for them as they can be for people in any profession. The workshop Friday will focus on eight modules, one of which is on the topic listening in the workplace.

"Lawyers need to learn to listen, to put it bluntly," said. "They're great at arguing and making their cases. If they can practice settling down, being more in the moment and concentrating on their breathing and being aware of their immediate environment, they can listen more effectively — both to themselves and to others.

Burkett has known Fisher, a poet, author, and Zen Buddhist priest, for several years. When talking with Norman about perhaps facilitating a workshop in the Twin Cities, Fisher said he had just done a well-received similar event for a group of attorneys in Berkeley, Calif.

"Lawyers tend to be very focused on productivity and time management," said Burkett. "They can really feel pressured by billable hours, maybe more so than lawyers of previous generations. Again, just being more aware and not feeling driven by having to accomplish something in a given amount of time helps people be more relaxed, calm and joyful in their work."

Novices welcome

Burkett stressed that attendees don't need to know anything about Zen meditation to get something out of the workshop. Rather, the event's focus will be on mindfulness in all activities, and how to develop tools that will help them be more present in their work environment, more productive but less driven — to establish a more meaningful connection to their workdays.

"It's not about Zen meditation per se, it's about using these methods to be present in the world that were developed in Asia originally," said Burkett. "This is about being more deeply present in one's life."

And as Moskowitz pointed out, the principles in meditation don't exist to help practitioners escape from stressful settings, but rather to be in them in a more healthy way.

"It gives me the ability to be present in those situations," said Moskowitz, who generally meditates for 20 minutes each morning. "It's a skill that you can employ when you need it. The more you do it, the better you get at it."

Seating at the event is limited to 200. At press time, a handful of tickets were still available. Prices are \$125 for employees of sponsoring organizations and \$175 for the general public.

Moskowitz and Ted O'Toole, who is also an assistant guiding teacher at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, will also lead a one-night workshop on mindfulness for legal professionals at the center. That event is planned for April 27.