



Leslie A. Gordon

Soon after graduating from college in 2004, Abigail Rivamonte took a hot yoga class for fun. It turned out she loved “sweating out the toxins and water weight.” A few years later, when she moved to the Bay Area to attend the University of San Francisco School of Law, “the first thing I did was find a yoga studio,” Rivamonte recalls. “I knew how important it had become to me.”

She attended two or three yoga classes a week throughout law school and continued as she began her career at the San Francisco Public Defender’s Office. “It went from being fun to necessary. I was always in trial. I went to the first class at six in the morning so by the time I got to court, I was ready to go. I felt alive and not so stressed.”

An ancient physical, mental, and spiritual practice, yoga has more than 20 million devotees in the United States, according to a 2012 *Yoga Journal* study. In the West, yoga classes typically teach a system of stretching and strengthening body postures as well as breathing techniques and occasionally meditation. Lawyers like Rivamonte are turning to yoga for all kinds of reasons—everything from stress relief to weight management.

Patent lawyer James Hsue started doing yoga to soothe the back pain he experienced after being hit by a car. “Through yoga, I’ve become more aware of the body, how it’s acting and feeling,” says Hsue, who takes a weekly class offered at his firm, Davis Wright Tremaine. He’s found yoga so beneficial that he keeps a yoga mat in his office and does some postures at home. “Now, when I tie my shoelaces, I’m more flexible.”

Like Hsue, Shannon Dilley started doing yoga to cope with several joint injuries. “I fell in love with it,” says Dilley, a former criminal defense lawyer now working on her LL.M. in climate change. She practices Bikram yoga and yin yoga, a stretching-intensive style.

“The two styles really complement each other,” says Dilley, who volunteers with the Justice & Diversity Center Destination Law School pro-

gram. “In the past, I’d get bored with certain exercise—running, swimming. But with Bikram, every day there’s something new I learn. I’m not bored. That’s something I think lawyers would like.”

Amy Greywitt, an IP litigation associate at Munger, Tolles & Olson, first began practicing yoga in law school and loved it so much that she completed a two-hundred-hour yoga teacher training program in 2012 when she had two free months between jobs. Until recently when she moved to Marin, Greywitt taught one early morning class a week at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) before heading to work at the law firm.

“Yoga is a good way to destress and let everything go, to bring yourself back to center,” Greywitt says. “Because of yoga, I’m more mindful in my practice. I’m less reactive and more thoughtful in responding.”

Attorneys tend to get out of balance both physically and emotionally, according to labor lawyer Judith Droz Keyes. “How many times can you lift a suitcase into an overhead bin without getting your hips misaligned? When one does poses, by definition, you’re making yourself even. You’re unkinking,” says Keyes, a partner at Davis Wright Tremaine, who “stumbled on” yoga more than twenty years ago. “I was looking for

STYLES *of* YOGA



Ashtanga

Ashtanga yoga, similar to vinyasa, links movement and breath, but ashtanga classes are especially rigorous and always feature the same poses in the same order.



Bikram

Sometimes called “hot yoga,” Bikram yoga is practiced in a sauna-like room heated to nearly 105 degrees Fahrenheit and includes an exact series of twenty-six postures, each performed twice, over ninety minutes.



Hatha

A generic term that refers to physical postures, hatha yoga encompasses nearly every type of Western yoga class. If you see a hatha class on a schedule, it’s likely a basic practice that may include some flowing between poses as in vinyasa and some props as in Iyengar. It may also include meditation or chanting.

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a class with an exercise component but I hate gyms.” Today, she attends three classes a week, including a donation-based class at Grace Cathedral and one in her office (along with Hsue). “Physically, it’s wonderful. It focuses on stretching and flexibility, with some strengthening. It makes me even and keeps me in balance.”

Drawn to yoga’s “calming effect,” family lawyer and part-time UC Hastings College of the Law professor Bridget Ausman-McKinley attends as many as five classes a week. “It’s great for taking yourself out of what’s going on, focusing on breathing and getting your body in alignment.”

Every time she goes to a class, there’s someone new trying it for the first time, says Ausman-McKinley. “As attorneys, it’s hard to be vulnerable. But what’s great about yoga is you can do it forever—there are really old and really young people doing it. It’s an amazing workout.”

For lawyers curious about yoga, Greywitt recommends going into it with an open mind. “Everyone is accepted in yoga and no one is good at it,” she explains. “Just be aware of your own body. Be willing to learn and not stress out about being good.”

Yoga teaches the philosophy of non-attachment and that should apply to physical results of the practice itself.



Iyengar

Great for the elderly, disabled, and injured, Iyengar classes focus on precise alignment in each pose, often using props like blocks, blankets, straps, chairs, and bolsters to ensure proper form. Poses are held longer in Iyengar classes.



Restorative

Fostering deep relaxation, restorative yoga classes use bolsters, blankets, sand bags, and blocks to place students in passive poses so the body can stretch and calm without exertion.



Vinyasa

Also called “flow,” vinyasa classes are movement-intensive practices in which poses transition fluidly from one to the other, often to music. A physical practice, vinyasa emphasizes syncing movement with breath, which helps clear the mind.

“You have to give it time,” Dilley explains. “I’ve been doing yoga for two years and I still can’t touch my toes. But I notice little tiny adjustments. Before yoga I couldn’t even touch my knees but now can almost touch my toes.”

All of the lawyers interviewed insist that yoga enhances their law practice. For Rivamonte, whose criminal defense practice is “very adversarial,” yoga helps her stay calm and “less likely to snap,” she explains. “I can tell the days I’ve worked out and the days I haven’t.”

Similarly, family law “is awful at times,” according to Ausman-McKinley. But yoga never fails to rejuvenate her. “After class, I think, ‘Wow, I’m glad I did that even though I didn’t want to.’”

Lawyers tend to hold all their stress inside their bodies, which ends up translating into tight muscles and other physical conditions, Dilley adds. This can permeate many aspects of our professional and personal lives. Yoga can not only soothe these ailments but also improve the ability to focus and help lawyers become “less reactive with a more rational and logical thought process.”

For Keyes, the calming and centering breathing techniques she’s learned in yoga classes are effective off the mat as well. “There are many times in



Yin

A slow-paced style in which poses are held for several minutes, yin yoga targets the connective tissues — such as ligaments and tendons — with the aim of increasing circulation in the joints and improving flexibility.

the course of a workday, especially if I have a court appearance, when the breathing comes into play. No one even knows I'm doing it," she says. "Traveling because of my job also brings many opportunities for stress and being out of balance. In those situations, yoga breathing is hugely valuable."

Overall, "yoga sustains and maintains me as a lawyer," Keyes says. "I've been practicing law for thirty-nine years and I'm going strong. I certainly think that practicing yoga is

one of the things that have allowed me to stay physically capable and gives me some of those opportunities to pause, to breathe. All of that makes me able to go on to do what I do with joy."

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