

September 16, 2019

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

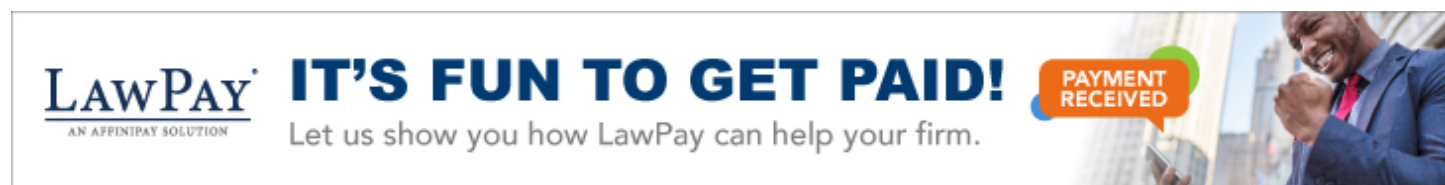
Mindfulness 101: Mindfulness, Compassion, and Hurricanes in Our Midst

By Scott L. Rogers

Share this:



Hurricane season is here and can remind us that circumstances change with little notice. Conditions, once pleasant and calm, can quickly become harsh and extreme. This is more than a description of weather patterns—it's also a useful metaphor for life.



Several years ago I penned an article for the Dade County Bar Association *Bulletin* titled [“Mindfulness and the Hurricane of Our True Nature,”](#) which looked to the elemental makeup of hurricanes—both the calm and chaotic—and the ways that we embody these same characteristics. It reflected on the fact that there are times when we feel peaceful, relaxed, and at ease. And there are moments when we feel agitated, angry, frustrated, and afraid. As an exploration in mindfulness, the column noted our preference for the calm and our tendency to deny or reject our more tumultuous and agitated characteristics and behaviors. It addressed the mindfulness insight that rather than grasp for the pleasant and push away the unpleasant, there can be great value in embracing the totality of who we are as human beings.

[R]ather than seeking to escape or change this experience in search of the eye of calm, mindfulness invites us to stay put and notice the fluctuating and sometimes intense flow of our interior experience. And because we are not just one aspect of the hurricane, but embody it all, there will be times when we also reside comfortably and at ease within the eye, knowing deep down that it is not the destination, but part of the experience. For every aspect of the storm depends on the other; without the eye wall, there could be no eye.

For those who find the practice of mindfulness to be challenging—agitated states of mind and body arising again and again—this insight is a reminder that this experience is not only typical, but the very grist of practice: to attend to these conditions within ourselves, drop into the felt experience, be it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and observe its evolving and changing nature. So often we instinctively resist and move away from these moments (often without awareness) that we lose touch with our capacity to weather them and emerge more responsive to their call. But, as Steve Jobs reminds us, “It’s a discipline; you have to practice it.”

This month’s column builds off this primary insight and metaphor by looking to the hurricanes arounds us—other people! And, indeed, it is rare when there are not multiple hurricanes forming at the same time. Some just happen to be closer to us than others. This expanded perspective asks us to consider and observe not just the “I” of our personal hurricane, but of those in our midst, which can be difficult to do. Through the practice of mindfulness, we come to appreciate that our own tumultuous natures are more a product of conditions and circumstances than something intrinsic to the heart of who we are. We observe firsthand that judgmental thoughts of self and others frequently *arise* unbidden. We appreciate that impulses, whether they be useful or destructive, *emerge* beyond our willing them into (or out of) existence. And we realize and accept that our conduct, more often than we might like, tends to be as much in the service of feeling better as it is in the service of doing the good we so wish to achieve. For it is with this wise and compassionate insight into our own nature that we can relate to others with an empathy and understanding that, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, they may not be enjoying this moment either, might even be doing the best they can, and, as is the case with all hurricanes, “this, too, shall pass.”

In the coming weeks of hurricane season, allow the rainy weather that you experience directly or know others are experiencing to remind you that in those moments when a colleague, adversary, or judge acts in ways that are unbecoming of our profession, that they may be going through a difficult time. Whether with family at home, with matters involving their own health, or in response to the stress and overwhelm of their work life, they may be struggling. As Longfellow wrote, “If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each [person]’s life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.” And, as our profession is addressing pressing mental health concerns, we appreciate all the more that these struggles may run very deep. Lost in our own agitation and personal concerns, we may not fully realize the efforts being made to “keep it together” and to just get through another day. And for some, the very nature of the work—the desire to be of assistance and to help others heal from their traumatic experiences—can become

the very real and deeply felt pain of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, which can leave us feeling angry, tired, fearful, sad, irritable, and alone.

Articles like this, and of the related theme explored in my [September “Mindful Lawyer” column](#) in the *Florida Bar News*, ask us to enlarge the adversarial lens through which we often view others and ourselves, and to approach our shared humanity in ways that are supportive and compassionate. Consider the possibility that we can most effectively represent our client’s best interest *without compromise* when we zealously remember that we are all in this together. For unlike the hurricanes tracked by the National Weather Service over which we have no control, when we bring wisdom and compassion to the hurricanes in our midst, we can play a meaningful role in helping them subside—by being present and steady, and not fueling them through the reactive force of our own powerful hurricane natures. And so, the next time you sense a hurricane forming—be it on the inside or outside—consider taking a few slower, deeper breaths, bringing awareness to the sensations in your body, and attending to the coming and going of thoughts and feelings. The sun may not immediately break through, but you will become ever so much more aware that it is there.

[Next Article >>>](#)

Authors



Scott L. Rogers

Scott L. Rogers is a nationally recognized leader in the area of mindfulness and law, as well as a teacher, researcher, and trainer. He is founder and director of the University of Miami School of Law’s [Mindfulness in Law Program](#), and he co-founded and co-directs the University of Miami’s [Mindfulness Research & Practice Initiative](#). Scott is the author of five books including the recently released *The Elements of Mindfulness*.

ABA American Bar Association |

/content/aba-cms-dotorg/en/groups/gpsolo/publications/gpsolo_ereport/2019/september-2019/mindfulness-101-mindfulness-compassion-hurricanes-our-midst