

# BOOK REVIEW



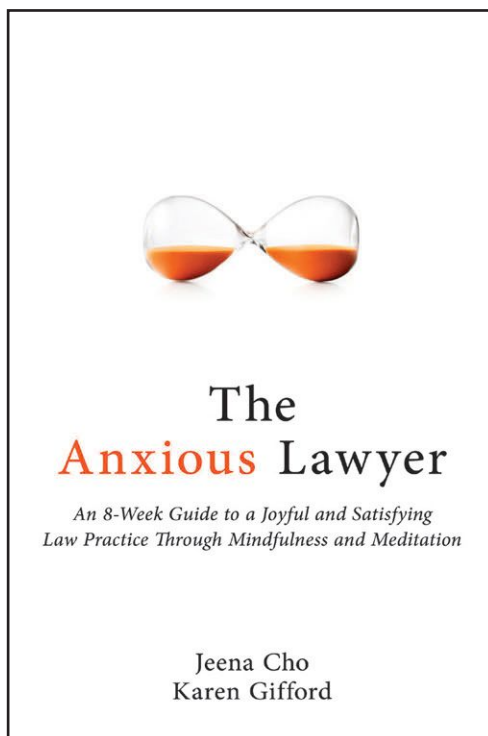
by Gregory C. Dyekman  
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## *The Anxious Lawyer* by Geena Cho and Karen Gifford

When I volunteered to review the book entitled “*The Anxious Lawyer*,” I didn’t know what I was getting into. I am a believer that anxiety is one of the chief occupational hazards for most practicing lawyers regardless of the nature of their practice, the length of their career or their basic personality. I thought I would see what the authors could teach me about anxiety avoidance.

I was surprised when “*The Anxious Lawyer*” showed up on my desk with the subtitle, “*An Eight-Week Guide to a Joyful and Satisfying Law Practice Through Mindfulness and Meditation.*” I admit that I chuckled a little as I started into the book because I thought I was probably not within any demographic for which these authors were shooting. Imagine my surprise, then, when the writings of two formerly anxiety-ridden lawyers hit home with me.

Throughout the book, the authors discuss their own experiences as busy lawyers suffering from all of the things that make lawyering a challenge – extra busy schedules, heavy workloads, demanding clients, challenging legal and emotional situations, fear of losing, lack of work/life balance and difficulty finding the time or inclination to care for one’s self. Their stories are easily relatable, and are seasoned with a healthy dose of earnestness about their desire to help their fellow lawyers avoid their past angst. Their introductory discussion of how meditation helped them change their outlook as lawyers and about themselves is remarkable and drew me in quickly. Both Ms. Cho and Ms.



Gifford write with just the right amount of emotion and logic for an audience of lawyers. Just when I thought things might get too “touchy feely,” references to empirical studies on the positive effects of meditation persuaded me to keep reading. By the time I finished the introductory section, I could hardly wait to start reading about the specifics of a meditation practice.

I’d never really thought of meditation as more than glorified navel gazing, but I was genuinely excited to read each of the eight meditation practice chapters. Each chap-

ter describes lawyer behaviors and stressors and how the particular meditation practice covered in that chapter could bring busy lawyers something that is more or less missing from their daily lives. Examples include compassion toward others, self-compassion and gratitude. The authors gently make a persuasive case for each different meditation practice by asking readers to examine their current stressful life, then suggesting how the meditation practice could help change that life for the better. The style of writing beautifully embodies the principles the authors are advocating. There is a sense of caring about the reader and the reader’s clients and co-workers, of patience and recognition that busy lawyers may find it hard to just dive into a meditation practice. Each chapter feels comforting, flexible and voluntary, but specifically does not disdain the intellectual and competitive characteristics that typify successful lawyers. I chose to read a chapter a night, but since the book proposes an eight week meditation practice, one chapter at the beginning of each week would have allowed more time to reflect on the promise of each practice.


I couldn’t resist giving meditation a try. In fact, I felt gently compelled to try it. As I write this, I am finishing my third week of meditation and I fully intend to try each of the eight approaches described in “*The Anxious Lawyer.*” I’ve enjoyed it so far, and genuinely share the authors’ hope that I will find one or more practices that will make me a lifelong meditator. I’ve had no trouble

seeing the potential benefit of self-exploration and improvement through meditation. Many times, the authors remind the reader that it is okay not to be perfect in a meditation practice and that when one's mind wanders, it is fine to gently return to the meditation practice and to recognize that potentially non-compliant brain activity is simply natural. I've taken great comfort in this patient permissive approach that has galvanized my effort to continue meditating despite the shortcomings of my practice so far. The book includes pages for use as a meditation journal to record one's reactions and observations after each session to facilitate the process of realizing the changes brought by meditation over time.

I'm still a complete novice, even after reading this entire book, but I think many lawyers who are looking for more self-control, relaxation, focus and coping skills will enjoy this peaceful nudge toward a lifetime meditation practice. The final portion of the book encourages the reader to take meditation more seriously and to take full advantage of the benefits of meditation. A number of publications and other resources are included for those whose interest is piqued. It's hard to say how many readers of *"The Anxious Lawyer"* will find a lifetime of meaningful meditation practice. But the experience of reading the book alone is pleasant and thought-provoking enough to recommend it to even the most skeptical among us.

I admire that Ms. Cho and Ms. Gifford seek to help other lawyers learn how valuable meditation might be to them in coping with the enormous stresses of the profession. I also admire their openness and candor about their own experiences and their sensitivity to the perfectionism of most of their readers. This is truly a book by lawyers for lawyers and their understanding of and compassion for the problem of professional anxiety and its many causes and effects gives this book its credibility.


As the Wyoming State Bar continues its current big push to improve attorney wellness, *"The Anxious Lawyer"* is definitely worthy of consideration by lawyers. It certainly has been worthwhile for me.♫



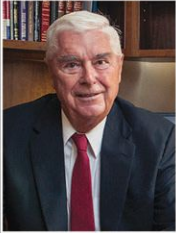
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