

Riding My Peloton Bike Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Christopher Ward** (March 20, 2024)

In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

In 1995, the film "Outbreak" was released. For the next 25 years, pandemics served as plot points for great movies, but we never expected that one could occur in real life.

Then came March 2020. I had just begun my fitness journey. I had lost weight, gotten in better shape, and was feeling good about myself. Then the world stopped, and perspective kicked in. I had to take an emotional lap.

For context, I'll share a few defining athletic moments from my life to focus my story.



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First, I was always an athlete. Before travel sports were what they are today, I played travel baseball in the '90s, through high school and into my less-than-stellar Division III athletic days at Moravian University. I kept in shape after college, but never to the level of a college athlete, when I started practicing law.

Second, I have also done Cycle for Survival to benefit the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for almost 15 years. That was my one day of spinning class a year. Well, at least until 2019 when I stepped on the scale at the gym and realized enough was enough. That November, we bought a Peloton bike. And that is where this story begins.

Discipline

Peloton instructor Adrian Williams likes to say, "There is no limit to what you can do."

In 2020, I had been practicing law for over 20 years in Delaware. I had carved out a niche for myself at my current firm and in the American Bankruptcy Institute. I worked hard to get there, but I clearly chose the law over about everything else. That was, and is, not sustainable.

It took a pandemic to show me that my focus was not on the right things, and I needed more discipline in my life, including in my practice of law. I had always focused on the end and not the means to the end. The Peloton platform began to show me that the process mattered.

The only thing I knew about "trusting the process" was the failed experiment of the Philadelphia 76ers tanking 10 straight basketball seasons and squandering first-round pick after first-round pick in the name of "The Process." I never appreciated that it had meaning to life — and to law.

Trust in the process of making yourself better, and you will be better. Self-love is not selfish. You choose your own mantra, but believing in yourself will have positive ramifications not only in life, but in practice.

For lack of a better term, I became obsessed with the Peloton platform, going from the bike, to adding meditation, yoga and stretching — all practices that were foreign to me at the time. Eventually, I got a Peloton treadmill and also started using the Peloton rowing platform.

What came of it, in addition to losing 50 pounds and being in the best shape of my life, was a change in perspective not only with respect to my personal life — which hopefully has helped me be a better husband, father and friend — but also in my professional life.

Now when I do not want to work out, I work out. That discipline carried over into my practice. I was able to compartmentalize better, focus on each task at hand, and provide a better work product to all involved — whether that was my clients or the members of our firm and practice group.

Developing the discipline to not only achieve an end, but to understand why the end was important, became a defining cornerstone of my ever-evolving practice of law. I have no doubt I am a better attorney and leader now than I was before I started this journey because I appreciate the breadth and depth of the journey itself, and not just the desired end game.

Networking

Peloton instructor Emma Lovewell says, "We get uncomfortable in order to get strong."

When we were all locked in our homes because of COVID-19, we needed ways to stay connected. One such way was participating in organized Peloton rides with other attorneys at my firm (we even have our own Peloton hashtag), as well as joint rides with other law firms and financial advisory firms.

Those virtual gatherings promoted being together in a time when we were not together, and allowed a virtual network to grow where one did not exist before. And while those virtual opportunities are not as common as they were during the pandemic, the connections made during that time remain.

Much to my wife's chagrin, it is hard for me to go to a conference or industry event without someone coming up to me and talking about Peloton. It has become a common ground in an age where there is not much common ground among people.

It has undoubtedly increased my visibility in the industry, and I have used that visibility to move up the ranks of my firm and the American Bankruptcy Institute, where I will begin my term as president in April. Never underestimate the connections you can make when doing something that is completely unrelated to the law. Every person you meet is a potential client or referral source.

And do not underestimate the inroads that discipline and confidence can provide, both on and off your virtual ride through life.

Confidence

Peloton instructor Jess Sims likes to remind riders of a simple mantra: "I can do hard things."

Not only has this fitness journey provided me with a healthier physical being, and an expanded group of industry connections, it has given me a confidence, both mentally and physically, that was festering beneath the surface but had not manifested itself into my legal practice.

Being able to complete a 120-minute endurance ride or a 45-minute treadmill and strength training combo workout (my personal favorite) is not only an athletic accomplishment, but also a mental breakthrough. It takes mental strength to commit to the process.

People bemoan to me, "I feel like every time I get on the bike, you have already been on there for an hour." Hopefully, that serves as motivation for them to do the same. My Peloton experience has given me the confidence to try yoga and meditation, which have increased my mental focus and well-being, not to mention, made me a better-prepared lawyer.

Being able to step back from a project or a conversation to breathe and think before going forward is an invaluable tool — a tool I did not previously have in my repertoire. Being able to push through an interval when you think all hope is lost only helps you focus more when you are pushing through a heated negotiation or contested hearing that you will encounter in practice.

I had always read articles about litigators getting into shape prior to a trial so that they could manage the rigors and stress that they were about to encounter. I never fully comprehended why until doing so myself. Physical fitness is only a portion of the benefit you get from working out; the mental aptitude, focus, discipline and confidence are the bonus — especially when you turn 50, as I just did. Every little bit counts!

Conclusion

This is not a Peloton commercial. The bike was what got me started on this fitness journey. For others, it can be anything — running, swimming, walking or yoga (which I highly recommend to everyone).

Do something, do anything, that will trigger your mind and body connection. It will not only benefit you physically and emotionally, but it will also carry over to your career. Increased stamina, heightened focus, a more disciplined approach, and a better understanding of others — and yourself — will flow from your experience.

It is a hard journey, but you, your career and your family are worth it.

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