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## How to Use Your Commute to Get to a Better Place

BY DAVID C. HAMILTON

As I mentioned in a previous Young Lawyer column, my daily commute is an hour-long drive each way. While some people are lucky enough to enjoy a quick commute to work by walking or biking, the rest of us have a long commute at the beginning and end of a hectic workday. Whether your commute is spent fighting traffic or taking public transportation, the time spent between work and home can be strategically used to reset your mind.

The thought of returning home, escaping a day filled with calls, clients, and deadlines, is always pleasant. However, it is not always easy for me to decompress during those quiet hours in the car as I transition from my work mode to home life. Depending on the day, if I do not reduce my stress levels during my commute, I am emotionally drained and physically fatigued by the time I walk through the front door.

To feel calm and at ease, I incorporate a few of the following activities into my nightly commute home. Even if I have to continue to work at home after dinner, I appreciate sitting down to dinner with my Wife at the end of the day without distractions. Rather than relaxing with a drink or two, please enlist one of the strategies below for reducing job-related stress and test one of these five ideas during your next commute to transition yourself from work mode to home mode.

**1. LISTEN UP.** Use your commute to recharge your brain and listen to something that interests you. For me, I don't consider myself a huge book reader but I recently downloaded the Libby app. It is a free app and service that connects directly to your local library and, subsequently, your local library's entire database of audiobooks. The app is super easy to use and understand. In recent weeks, I have torn through Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Choke*. Right now, I am fully immersed in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. Unfortunately, as with all library books, there is a time limit to finish the books. My library only allows two weeks per loan.

Some days I am not in the mood for listening to an audiobook, then I turn my attention to the Ryen Russillo Podcast presented by The Ringer. Unlike many sports-centric television shows and podcasts always

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spouting their hot-takes, thankfully, Russillo offers a well-reasoned and researched approach to sports. Plus, he has a section at the end of his podcast called life advice. It is not an original idea, but when my day-to-day work is talking with clients and coaching them through life decisions, it is interesting to hear someone else try to do the same thing. I judge a podcast on its ability to keep me laughing out loud on my commute even when I am sitting in I-95 gridlock. In that respect, Russillo delivers.

**2. QUIET TIME.** Too often, people need to "find time to be quiet." Thankfully, a commute is already built into your daily routine so no need to rework an already packed schedule. During this quiet time, for 10 to 15 minutes each day, allow yourself the ability to simply be in the present moment. This requires silencing your phone and radio and sitting comfortably. As you drive, observe your breath and thoughts, try to empty your mind.

If the aforementioned sounds intimidating, try a guided meditation app on your phone and follow along. The three popular meditation apps are Calm, Ten Percent Happier Meditation, and Headspace. I cannot speak from experience, but I have an in-law who is an attorney and he swears mindfulness and meditation really do work. He indicated to me that you do not have to be perfect at meditation for it to be beneficial as brief sessions still work, especially at the beginning. So, don't overthink it and just start. I bet you will be surprised by meditation's powerful ability to decrease stress and help you feel more in control of your life.

**3. PHONE A FRIEND.** When it comes to winding down, spending time with those important to you is almost always meaningful use of your day. While time or location prevents us from spending quality time with friends, we still can call a friend during our commute

home. For me, it is difficult to maintain relationships with friends. When I do speak with a friend, even for just five minutes, it provides me with a sense of joy and calm. The phone call puts me at ease and I relax and enjoy the ride home. Therefore, I implore you during your next commute to reach out to a friend because we need to be checking on each other.

**4. PRACTICE GRATITUDE.** Since entering the practice of law and particularly my field, family law, I have felt a sense of overwhelming gratitude. I rarely consciously think such feelings as they tend to filter into my head sporadically. However, when I do take a few moments to think about everything I have in my life, my stress about the seemingly insignificant falls away. Ergo, I urge you to do the same. Start by focusing on simple things in your life and the people you love. The mix of gratitude and contentment will not only help you decompress from the stress of the office and the day, but they are the perfect foundation for a wonderful evening at home.

**5. ENVISION YOUR EVENING.** Time at home is precious. To make the most of my evenings at home, I try to visualize how I want the night to go. While not every night goes as planned as inclement weather can delay my arrival or a change in dinner plans causes the night to spiral out of control, if I outline and prioritize my tasks, I can simplify my nightly routine, thereby reducing any unnecessary stress.

It is helpful to remember that sometimes we need to slow down a bit to achieve our goals. Burnout is a real thing, and it is impossible to stay productive if we burn the candle at both ends. In addition to utilizing my time in the car, my other suggestion is to find short periods to recharge and relieve stress. Lastly, it is important to remember that decompressing is about more than just taking a break, it is essential to stay productive in the long term.



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