

# The Still Center, LLC

The Embodied Lawyer

By Denise A. Robinson

Spring 2016\*

I've been a runner all of my life. Figures, given that my late dad was a track coach and my mom regularly does two-a-day workouts at nearly 70 years old! I used to run for physical fitness alone, but as I encountered challenges in law school and later as a practicing lawyer, I started to notice the psychological benefits of a good run as well. In particular, if I had a difficult decision to make or a complex matter at work, I found going for a run consistently helped me work out solutions to the problems at hand. I've since learned there's science to back up my experience, including research showing the cognitive benefits of increased blood flow to the brain during exercise. In addition, if that exercise takes place outdoors, safe exposure to the natural world has been associated with a decrease in the body's fight or flight stress response, which corresponds to an increase in the brain's executive function.

The relationship between my runs and problem solving is just one example of connecting the body and the mind for professional benefit. While lawyers and other knowledge workers are hired for what's in our heads, the reality is that we are more than our thoughts, which offer an evaluation on what's going on within ourselves or out in the world. We also have physical sensations, which offer us information about what actually is happening. Tapping into our sensory experiences is referred to in contemplative studies as embodiment, which encourages us to understand our bodies and minds as mutually beneficial. This runs contrary to our cultural norm, which is to subordinate the physical in favor of the mental, but the tide is turning. For example, a book published by Emeran Mayer, MD, *The Mind Gut Connection: How the Hidden Conversation Within Our Bodies Impacts Our Mood, Our Choices, and Our Overall Health*, explores the connection between the microbiome in the digestive system and the brain, bringing new meaning and credibility to the "gut feeling." Consider also the example of prominent trial lawyer David Boies. As described in Malcolm Gladwell's *David & Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*, Boies attributes his success in part to keen listening skills and an exceptional memory developed as a result of having dyslexia, which made acquiring information through reading difficult. Tuning into to his sense of hearing gave him access to information that others miss, and information is power for lawyers and others who solve problems for a living.

How might your career benefit from tapping into your senses?

FOUNDING PRINCIPAL

Denise A. Robinson

WEBSITE

[www.thestillcenter.com](http://www.thestillcenter.com)

EMAIL

[denise@thestillcenter.com](mailto:denise@thestillcenter.com)

\*ORIGINALLY POSTED ON GWACBAR.ORG AS PART OF THE 2016-17 RESIDENT BLOGGER PROGRAM OF THE GREATER WASHINGTON AREA CHAPTER, WOMEN LAWYERS DIVISION, NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION ("GWAC").