

# Just Be It: A Look at Well-Being from the Inside Out

*by Denise A. Robinson, Founding Principal, The Still Center*

The foundation of well-being is understanding who you are. In other words, it's the "being" part of the expression that drives the rest. Cultivating this understanding requires reflection and other contemplative inquiry, but we don't get much practice with this because we are part of a (national) culture that prioritizes doing. For instance, consider the following:

- How many times in your childhood were you asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and expected to respond with some type of job or something that you do.
- The resonance and endurance of Nike's® slogan, "Just Do It."
- How much of our identity is attached to what we do, despite the fact that a job and even a career can come and go. This attachment to what we do despite its relative instability helps to explain, at least in part, the levels of depression and substance dependency within the legal profession.

To understand how deep the roots of this focus on doing reach, examine the following Thomas Jefferson quote, "Do you want to know who you are? Don't ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you."

No wonder the pursuit of well-being can seem like such a struggle!

Having said that, this is not a rail against getting things done. Doing is a necessary part of life, and certainly, lawyers are no strangers to the expectation to perform. However, we have to be cautious not to do for the sake of doing, but instead, take actions that are purpose driven. Purpose is about understanding why you do what you do, and more fundamentally, your *raison d'être* (reason for being). Those of us who practice mindfulness call it intentionality, which constantly brings us back to the questions, "Who am I and what do I truly want?" While the practice of intentionality is one that can help all of us understand ourselves better and be more effective in our doing, it is of particular benefit to members of stigmatized identity groups who live and work in a society that constantly seeks to define us from the outside in. Intentionality reveals to us the opportunity to define ourselves from the inside out, ultimately providing us with greater agency as we carry out our work and lives.

## Put it in Practice

Developing an understanding of who you are and taking intentional action toward being your best self requires practice. (Yes, that means we have to do something, but it's purposeful!) To start, reflect on the qualities and characteristics that describe you, your mission in life, or who

you strive to be. Get curious about whether those are generated from within, or if they are things you've been told about yourself. With the latter in particular, consider whether they are descriptors that serve you or not, and give yourself permission to release the ones that don't. Using what's left, begin to create a phrase that describes who you are. Think of it as your personal elevator pitch and write it down. Refer to it often, change it as you get more clarity, and use it as a guide in your decision making to take intentional, purpose-driven action in your work and life. With practice, observe how leading with who you are helps you take meaningful action and moves you to greater well-being.

### About the Writer

Denise promotes connection within and without through a combination of diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI) advocacy and yoga and mindfulness teaching. She formerly practiced employment law, continues to work primarily with lawyers, and writes and speaks on the intersection between DEI and well-being. She can be reached at [denise@thestillcenter.com](mailto:denise@thestillcenter.com).