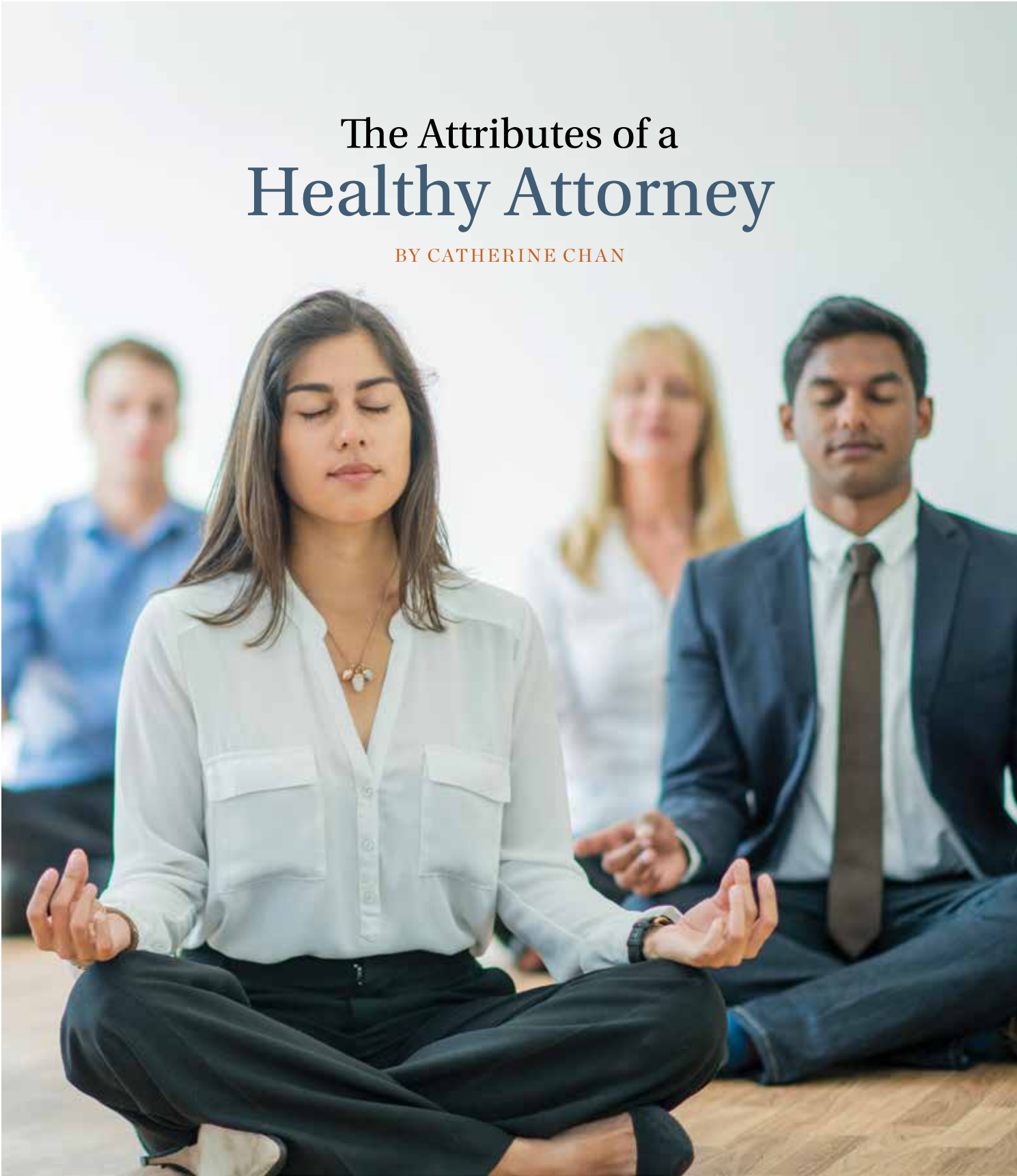


The Attributes of a Healthy Attorney

BY CATHERINE CHAN





The model attorney is a healthy attorney. A healthy attorney is an attorney who acknowledges that their mental and emotional health are

critical components of their physical health. A healthy attorney acknowledges that their career and life's significant challenges demand holistic approaches to well-being.

A healthy attorney meets challenges in their career with compassion and understanding and safe responses to common triggers. A healthy attorney uses emotional intelligence to confront difficult personalities and circumstances safely. A healthy attorney acknowledges that because challenges are always present, they must continually refine and hone their communication and leadership skills.

A healthy attorney understands that mistakes represent learning moments and accepts failure as an important teacher in their career and in life. A healthy attorney continually exercises patience with themselves and with others. A healthy attorney maintains relationships with professional mentors and specialists to navigate their career and their emotional and psychological needs.

A Look at Harper Lee's Attorney Prototype

In her fictional character Atticus Finch, who is an attorney, author Harper Lee offered a prototype role model for humanity. Atticus embodies a noble, ethical, and moral man. He is portrayed as calm, fair, and compassionate. He educates his children by modeling consistent good behavior. He encourages them to see that people have both good and bad qualities, and that they deserve to be respected and forgiven. He does not lie to his children to protect them, offering instead empathy that "there's a lot of ugly things in the world," and that he can't protect them from all those things.

Atticus continuously demonstrates the philosophies of equality and compassion when he serves the poor, when he confronts racial prejudice, and when he repeats that humans are owed empathy. He himself demonstrates these attributes in his conduct with every-

one. When he encounters societal scorn for choosing to defend an African American man falsely accused of a crime, he embraces the moment to teach others. His teaching is neither pedantic nor self-righteous. It is enlightening and honorable.

Atticus is an abiding character not just for lawyers but for all humans because of his consistency toward justice, empathy, and integrity. An attorney's life can be imbued with these characteristics, and it is healthy to aspire toward those characteristics. A healthy attorney can dispel negative attorney stereotypes like narcissism, a penchant toward aggression, and haughtiness.

Healthy Ingredients: Humility, Balance, and Perspective

A healthy attorney is humble, no matter their achievements. A healthy attorney exercises continual empathy for themselves and others. In the teachings of Jesus Christ, there is a scene where Jesus washed the feet of the disciples before the Last Supper.¹ Walking in sandals in the first century made it imperative that feet be washed before a communal meal. When Jesus rose from the Last Supper to wash the feet of the disciples, he was demonstrating his humility and servanthood and forgiveness. "I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you."² Jesus was a sufferer. He empathized with all of us because we all suffer too. He was not a king or a conqueror. He loved the least among us and encouraged us to do the same.

A healthy attorney seeks balance in their life. An outsized identity with our profession limits our lifetime growth. Life exists outside our work. Attorneys deserve balance between their lives and careers, like everyone else.

In his book *The Underachiever's Manifesto*, Dr. Ray Bennett, MD, urges us to quit "achievement addiction" that "leaves behind failed

relationships, unhealthy bodies, corrupted minds, or some terrible combination of all three."³ He warns that "going the extra mile leads to exhaustion."⁴ And he encourages us to live by "ten principles of underachievement":

- 1) Life's too short; 2) Control is an illusion; 3) Expectations lead to misery; 4) Great expectations lead to great misery; 5) Achievement creates expectations; 6) The law of diminishing returns applies everywhere; 7) Perfect is the enemy of good; 8) The tallest blade of grass is the surest to be cut; 9) Accomplishment is in the eye of the beholder; and 10) Remember the 4 percent value-added principle (human beings are 96% identical to chimpanzees. The most successful individuals in the world, as well as the most hopelessly underaccomplished ones are, biologically speaking, all pretty close to apes.).⁵

While all attorneys strive toward accomplishment, it should never be at all costs. Humility and perspective go a long way toward achieving life goals, not just life accomplishments.

Parting Thoughts

I sought the position of CBA president to have the privilege and opportunity to communicate with Colorado lawyers about prioritizing their mental health, and to encourage us all to have empathy and compassion for each other and for the community at large. In this, my last column as CBA president, I hope I've persuaded even one of you to invest in studying yourself, your career, and your relationships. I hope you choose to be kind to yourself and to each other. I hope you choose to exercise the axiom of standing in another's shoes before you judge them. I wish each of you success on your paths toward your best life, toward your success, and toward your fulfillment. **CL**

NOTES

1. John 13:1-17.

2. *Id.* at 15.

3. Bennett, *The Underachiever's Manifesto: The Guide to Accomplishing Little and Feeling Great* (Chronicle Books, LLC 2006).

4. *Id.* at 53.

5. *Id.* at 31-45.