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Holistic Lawyering

Jonathan R. Cohen

University of Florida Levin College of Law, cohenjr@law.ufl.edu

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Holistic Lawyering

"Transforming Practices" advances dialogue on spirituality in law practice

By Jonathan R. Cohen

Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in Legal Life by Steven Keeva. Contemporary Books. 1999. 256 pages. \$24.95.

Steven Keeva writes that business consultant Joel Barker "regularly asks his clients [the] 'what if' question: *What is the one thing that you cannot do in your industry that, if it could be done, would fundamentally change things for the better[?]*"¹ As to the industry of lawyering, Keeva suggests an answer, "*Begin a conversation on the role of the inner life—of spirituality, if you will—in law practice.*"² In *Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in Legal Life*, Keeva has done just that: He has prompted a dialogue on spirituality within lawyering. To find true satisfaction, he suggests, lawyers must find purpose, meaning, and inner peace within their work. Put differently, one must fundamentally integrate being a lawyer with being a person. But how is this to be done?

Drawing upon varied psychological and spiritual traditions, *Transforming Practices* outlines seven aspects of holistic lawyering that help lead to such satisfaction: balance, contemplation, mindfulness, non-action ("time-out"), healing, listening, and service. Keeva then offers suggestions for moving toward such practice on both individual and social levels. For example, a lawyer who feels overwhelmed by the rush of work and the grind of billable hours might take a daily walk in a park near the office, keep an impressionistic journal, or practice time-shifting, that is, consciously choose different inner rhythms for different activities.³ A lawyer who finds his work devoid of meaning might ask himself not, "What can the law do for me?" but rather, "How can I use the law to

Jonathan R. Cohen is assistant professor of law at the University of Florida, Levin College of Law in Gainesville, Fla. He can be reached at cohenjr@law.ufl.edu.

serve others?"⁴ From both analytical and prescriptive perspectives, this sevenfold framework is valuable.

Yet the brilliance of the book lies in its illustration of this framework through concrete, real-life narratives of lawyers who have changed their practices to find greater meaning. Keeva is a legal journalist by background, and his vivid accounts illustrate these transformative practices richly. It is common, though erroneous, to dismiss the type of the spiritual matters Keeva addresses as too ethereal to have practical import. *Transformative Practices* strongly refutes such a view, for it describes in detail scores of instances in which lawyers have profoundly changed their lives through greater mindfulness to their work and themselves. Consider, for example, Keeva's description of one attorney's recognition of the importance of service to others:

[After] a full day's work, [Attorney Michael Gergely] was getting ready to leave the office and go home to his wife and children when a disheveled, aimless-looking stranger walked in.

The man sat down, and Gergely asked what he could do for him. The man said he needed help and began to talk. And talk. After a while, not really seeing much of a point to the man's monologue, Gergely became anxious. His wife, Maureen, had made one of his favorite dishes, chicken soup, and he couldn't wait to get started on a hot bowl. At this point, his visitor was talking about various kinds of lawsuits he thought he might file. But it was going nowhere.

Gergely started thinking about how to get rid of him. He recalls what happened next.

"At that instant, I turned to my right, and my eyes fell on a plaque that I have on my wall. It's from the Book of Matthew. It says, 'In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' . . .

"What I realized then was that I wasn't doing this man a favor. He was helping me by letting me do what I was supposed to be doing in my law office. I was supposed to be serving people, especially the least of my brethren. . . ."⁵

Parts of this book will be deeply resonant for those within the dispute resolution community because some of the practices that Keeva describes involve activities common within dispute resolution. (See especially chapter 7, "The Healing Practice"; chapter 8, "The Listening Practice"; and chapter 10, "The Integrative Practice.") Yet the domain of this book extends well beyond dispute resolution. *Transforming Practices* documents profound changes occurring within legal practice and simultaneously helps illuminate the road ahead. Indeed, the psychological insight, moral questioning, concrete applications, and eloquent writing on a topic of significance combine to impart a sacred quality to this book. Whether you are a practitioner, a student, or a scholar, I suspect that you will learn from reading this book. I know that I did.

Endnotes

¹ STEVEN KEEVA, *TRANSFORMING PRACTICES: FINDING JOY AND SATISFACTION IN THE LEGAL LIFE* 216 (1999).

² *Id.* (emphasis original).

³ *Id.* at 87-88, 92-96.

⁴ *Id.* at 126.

⁵ *Id.* at 132.