

Andra B. Greene of Irell & Manella LLP uses yoga for stress relief in court and at the office

By Amanda Schallert
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A steady yoga breath is what helps Andra B. Greene feel at peace during stressful situations — like waiting for a judge or jury to deliver a verdict.

Detachment, and focusing on what's in her control, are lessons the Irell & Manella LLP partner has learned from years of practicing vinyasa flow yoga. Greene, who heads the class action defense practice at the firm, was a 28-year lawyer when she first started yoga. She attended her first class on a President's Day weekend in 2011 after coming back from a stressful mediation in Encino.

It was a decision that's been transformative for her life, she said.

"What I've found in my practice is that it hasn't made me a less aggressive litigator, but I can step back and do my job better," she said. "You're not supposed to be attached to the outcome of something. It's all about the process."

In May, Greene became a certified yoga instructor. She now teaches monthly classes to staff and attorneys in the firm's Newport Beach office. The sessions take place in the Layn Phillips courtroom-converted-yoga room, with a pink-lined tapestry and 10 electric candles lining the bench. Usually on a Friday, when members of the firm are less busy, about a dozen people line their yoga mats up side by side and follow Greene's lead.

Greene said she's always used exercise as a form of stress relief, from marathon running to regular workouts with a personal trainer and a walking club membership.

But yoga was different.

An hour practicing yoga is an hour she spends meditating and being present. It used to surprise her that even in the midst of her work day, she could take the time and not



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Irell & Manella LLP partner Andra B. Greene teaches and practices yoga, saying it helps her remain at peace during stressful situations such as waiting for a verdict.

think about her cases. It's a strong contrast to running on a treadmill while simultaneously reading case files, she said.

Cathy T. Moses, an associate who met Greene nine years ago at the firm, said it fits Greene's character to have committed so much of her time to yoga. By the time Greene passed her test for certification this year, she had clocked more than 240 hours of yoga over five months.

"She's someone who really dives into things, so it does not surprise me," Moses said. "She's one of those 110 percenters."

Moses has attended two of Greene's classes in the office and said they offer a helpful variation from the other exercise she does. The classes are a part of the firm mentality to encourage healthy living choices, said Michael B. Ermer, managing partner in the Newport Beach office.

Ermer, who has known Greene for about 30 years, said her yoga benefits the entire staff.

He added that he thinks it's impressive that Greene, who was the first woman partner in the office and has a history of wins defending class actions, is able to fit yoga into her schedule. Greene was managing partner from 2008 to 2014.

"If you look at Andra as a member of our firm and a member of our community, she's been a pioneer in many ways," he said. "If all that wasn't enough, she also teaches yoga. For most people it would make your head spin."

When Greene started practicing law, she said she had a tendency to worry intensely about her cases. She once almost missed a Thanksgiving celebration with her in-laws because she wanted to make sure she filed an interrogatory answer a full two weeks early.

She notices that she's less nervous now, and what she cares most about is being prepared. Winning still helps, too.

"I don't worry about things I have no control over, but I very much focus on things that are in my control," she said. "I've been a lawyer for 34 years and there were so many things I couldn't affect."

Beyond the physical and mental health benefits, Greene said she sometimes can use yoga as a way to break the tension when relationships with other lawyers on a case are strained.

In the same way that law is a practice, yoga is a practice too, she said. So along with her Andra B. Greene partner card, she'll bring out her Andra Ellingson yoga instructor card, complete with a heart and the Hindi greeting word "namaste" on the back. In a recent deposition where the atmosphere was hostile, she said she handed her yoga instructor card to a witness.

"It's always disarming to people," she said. "I give my card and then all of a sudden we have a connection and it's not as adversarial."