

# I Can Fly, LLC

Pat Snyder, J.D., CPCC, MAPP

PAT SNYDER brings nearly 30 years' experience practicing law and 20 years writing a regular humor column to her current business of coaching attorneys. She believes humor can be an important tool in managing stress. In her book *The Dog Ate My Planner: Tales and Tips from an Overbooked Life*, she pokes fun at her own experiences trying to juggle way too much – a problem she first encountered when she started practicing law while raising three children.

In addition to her JD from the University of Akron School of Law, Pat received a masters degree in applied positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania in 2012. She has published research on the power of using one's natural strengths to flourish in the practice of law and believes strengthening the funny bone can also enhance our creativity and help us see all sides of an issue.

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# Emotion: The Key to the Mind's Influence on Health

Paul E. McGhee, PhD, [www.LaughterRemedy.com](http://www.LaughterRemedy.com)

*"This I believe to be the chemical function of humor: to change the character of our thought." (Lin Yutang)*

*"The chemicals that are running our body and our brain are the same chemicals that are involved in emotion. And that says to me that . . . we'd better pay more attention to emotions with respect to health." (Candace Pert)*

Candace Pert, one of the most respected researchers in the area of mind/body medicine, noted in Bill Moyers' *Healing and the Mind* television series (in the 1990s) that emotions, registered and stored in the body in the form of chemical messages are the best candidates for the key to the health connection between mind and body. It is through the emotions you experience in connection with your thoughts and daily attitudes—actually, through the neurochemical changes that accompany these emotions—that your mind acquires the power to influence whether you get sick or remain well.

The key, according to Pert, is found in complex molecules called neuropeptides. "A peptide is made up of amino acids, which are the building blocks of protein. There are twenty-three different amino acids. Peptides are amino acids strung together very much like pearls strung along in a necklace." Peptides are found throughout the body, including the brain and immune system. The brain contains many different neuropeptides, including endorphins. Neuropeptides are the means by which all cells in the body communicate with each other. This includes brain-to-brain messages, brain-to-body messages, body-to-body messages, and body-to-brain messages.

Individual cells, including brain cells, immune cells, and other body cells, have receptor sites that receive neuropeptides. The kinds of neuropeptides available to cells are constantly changing, reflecting variations in your emotions throughout the day. The exact combination of neuropeptides released during different emotional states has not yet been determined.

The kind and number of emotion-linked neuropeptides available at receptor sites of cells influence your probability of staying well or getting sick. Pert notes that "Viruses use these same receptors to enter into a cell, and depending on how much of the natural peptide for that receptor is around, the virus will have an easier or harder time getting into the cell. So our emotional state will affect whether we'll get sick from the same loading dose of a virus."

This kind of conclusion from a researcher at the cutting edge of research on the mind/body connection should give you all the motivation you need to undertake the Humor Skills Training Program described elsewhere at this website. Your sense of humor helps assure that these chemical messages are working for you, not against you. "The chemicals that are running our body and our brain are the same chemicals that are involved in emotion. And that says to me that . . . we'd better pay more attention to emotions with respect to health." (Candace Pert)

It is noted in an article listed below that some research suggests that humor and laughter stimulate the production of helper T-cells, the cells attacked by the AIDS virus. If humor does help the body battle AIDS (there is presently no evidence that it does—or does not), it probably wouldn't be as a mere result of the production of more helper T-cells, since there would be every reason to expect these new cells to also be invaded by the virus. Rather, it would probably be due to the neuropeptides produced by the positive emotional state that goes along with humor and laughter.

Along these lines, Pert has noted that "The AIDS virus uses a receptor that is normally used by a neuropeptide. So whether an AIDS virus will be able to enter a cell or not depends on how much of this natural peptide is around, which . . . would be a function of what state of emotional expression the organism is in."

This research will not be exhaustively reviewed at this website, but some of the major studies will be presented to show you that there is no longer any doubt that your daily mood or frame of mind makes a significant contribution to your health—especially when the same mood or emotional state persists day after day, year after year. Anything you can do to sustain a more positive, upbeat frame of mind in dealing with the daily hassles and problems in your life contributes to your physical health at the same time that it helps you cope with stress and be more effective on the job.

We've known for a long time that good nutrition, exercise, adequate sleep, avoidance of harmful drugs, and the adoption of good sanitary habits in our daily activities aide the body's ability to do this. And we now know that doing things to build a positive attitude into your daily life is equally important. And your sense of humor is one of the most powerful tools you have to sustain a positive frame of mind—even on the tough days.

The body responds favorably to positive attitudes, thoughts, moods, and emotions (e.g., love, hope, optimism, caring, intimacy, joy, laughter and humor), and negatively to negative ones (anger, hopelessness, pessimism, anxiety, depression, loneliness, etc.). So it is important to organize your life so as to take control of keeping the balance in favor of as positive a focus as possible.

This doesn't mean that you should avoid experiencing or expressing negative emotions. You need to find ways to express whatever emotions you feel. Candace Pert, a former Chief of the Section of Brain Biochemistry of the Clinical Neurosciences Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health studies influences upon health at the neurochemical level. She noted recently that "repressing emotions can only be causative of disease."

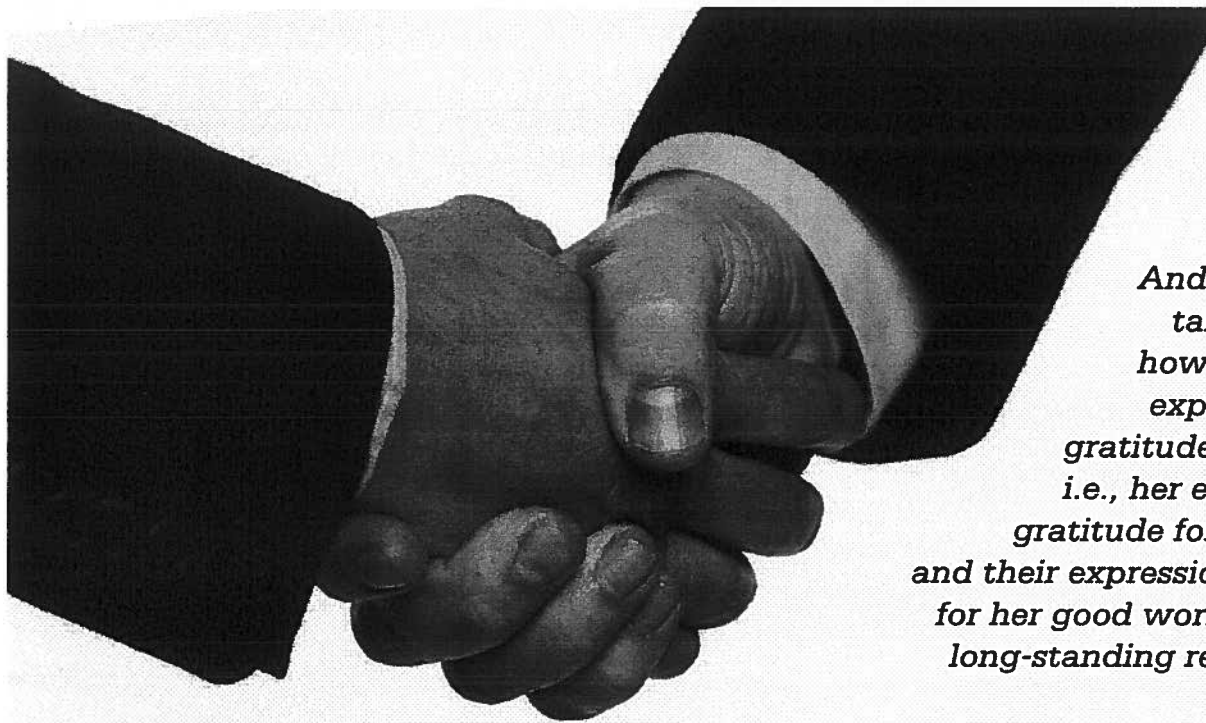
Failure to find effective ways to express negative emotions causes you to "stew in your own juices" day after day, and this chronic immersion in negativity is what appears to produce harmful influences on health.

Your sense of humor is one of the most powerful tools you have to make certain that your daily mood and emotional state support good health, instead of working against it. Humor also helps you maintain a healthy lifestyle in general, a practice that is increasingly being recommended by health care professionals as the country shifts toward an emphasis on preventive medicine.

It is no coincidence that people are commonly drawn to humor in the midst of difficult periods in their life. They recognize from their own experience that a good laugh helps substitute a positive for a negative frame of mind. One of the most frequent comments I hear after my programs for cancer patients is something like, "You know, it's so true. There's no way I would have been able to get through all this if I couldn't laugh at some of the things that happen."

While they are talking about humor's ability to help them cope, we now know that being able to cope also influences your body's biochemistry. By learning to improve your sense of humor, you help insure that the chemical messages Dr. Pert is talking about are working for you, not against you.

[Adapted from McGhee, P. E. (1999). *Health, Healing and the Amuse System: Humor as Survival Training*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.]



*And still another talked about how the mutual expression of gratitude with clients, i.e., her expression of gratitude for the business and their expression of gratitude for her good work, had fueled long-standing relationships.*

# Gratitude, Kindness: *Super Strengths In Law Practice*

*By Pat Snyder*

I care passionately about my clients, but you know, I'm not doing brain surgery here. No one is going to die. So, you need some perspective, and when I'm feeling really down, and depressed, and just feel like I don't wanna do this any more, I go do something. It sounds corny, but I go do something nice for somebody. I perform a random act of kindness; it makes me feel better.

*– Woman named to the Super Lawyers list*

We all know that analytical strengths are critical to the practice of law. Persistence, hard work, integrity and courage are paramount as well. But what about softer strengths, like gratitude and kindness?

A study I recently completed in partial fulfillment of a Master of Applied Positive Psychology degree at the University of Pennsylvania suggests that the regular use of "heart" (emotion-based) strengths, coupled with the more

expected "head" (analytical) strengths can take a law practice to the next level. Especially in the areas of business development, firm management, and work-life balance, relationship-enriching heart strengths – gratitude, kindness, social intelligence, enthusiasm, forgiveness, hope, love, appreciation of beauty and excellence, citizenship, humor, curiosity, spirituality – can play a pivotal role.

For the study, I contacted 140 women attorneys across the country who had been listed in the Super Lawyers or Rising Star directories, and invited them to take the Brief Strengths Test on Penn's website [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org) so we could identify their top, most energizing character strengths among the 24 naturally occurring strengths identified by positive psychologists.

Because researchers have found a correlation between wellbeing and the regular use of our top strengths, I also requested they participate in an optional interview about whether they used their strengths regularly in the practice of law and if so, how.

Regular use of both heart and head strengths has been linked to increased resilience, so I was especially curious about strengths strategies these women were using to cope with today's faster-paced, more competitive legal profession and its effects on work-life balance.

I predicted that consistent with positive psychology research on wellbeing, I would find that these successful practitioners were finding ways to use their natural strengths in their practices on a regular basis. I also predicted that head strengths would be the most prevalent. Both men and women lawyers, tested with the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in the early '90s, showed up as Thinkers rather than Feelers.

What I did not predict was that the predominant character strengths of these super-achievers would be gratitude and kindness.

Granted, the 17 willing to participate may have been a kinder and more grateful lot than those who did not. But even so, what was striking was their ability to offer specific ways they use their heart strengths to navigate the critical areas of business development and client retention, firm management,

and work-life integration. In each of these areas, they were using their heart strengths to build relationships.

One participant, a partner, reflected on how her multiple heart strengths of love, gratitude and social intelligence play into business development:

"I think that just being able to ... try to figure out what makes somebody tick is always a good quality. Essentially, what we're describing here is almost sales. Those qualities are helpful. They're not sufficient. But if a client has to choose between somebody who they have a connection with who also has the credentials and somebody they didn't connect with and has the credentials, I have to believe they're gonna choose the one that they connected with."

Another commented that the way she gets business is through "friendships and connections and relationships with people who have the ability to send me business."

And still another talked about how the mutual expression of gratitude with clients, i.e., her expression of gratitude for the business and their expression of gratitude for her good work, had fueled long-standing relationships.

In the area of firm management, a founding partner noted that her strength of kindness made it natural to notice personal issues her employees were going through and express empathy. Her strength of gratitude inspired her to thank employees for their hard work and reward them for it financially.

Another partner used her heart strength of forgiveness to forgive both herself and the employees she mentors. As she put it:

"... people make mistakes, and I try to not, you know, clobber them over and over again with one mistake, and try to help them learn. And I try to put my mistakes in perspective as well, and not – you know, there was a time in my life where I really would kind of go over and over and over in my head a mistake that I made, and I just realized it wasn't very productive. So I just try to come to the lessons and move on."

Despite the usefulness of heart strengths in their role as lawyers, participants were keenly aware that if carried too far, kindness could be seen as weakness and they could be taken advantage of both within a law office and with opposing counsel. Those who used their softer strengths effectively displayed what Wharton professor Adam Grant has described as "otherish" giving in his new book Give

and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success. They gave, but also looked out for their own interests and were strategic in their relationships with less generous "takers."

Finally, it is not surprising that study participants reported work-life balance as their biggest challenge. Fifteen of the 16 who agreed to an interview were raising or had raised at least one child while actively practicing, and 12 described themselves as litigators.

Gratitude, kindness and social intelligence showed up as heart strengths that were pivotal to making flexible childcare arrangements with back-up plans and creating networks of friends and family to help. Here again, a balance of heart and head strengths came up. Analytical strengths like self-regulation and persistence played well in managing complicated family schedules, but participants warned against bringing cross-examination skills home, especially with a stay-at-home dad.

The study suggests that there are good business reasons for lawyers with strong heart strengths to cultivate them personally. It also makes good business sense for the legal environments where they work to pay attention to these strengths and create a culture friendly to their use.

Lawyers with heart may find it easier than their more strongly analytical

counterparts to become rainmakers and firm managers and to lead the way for others to develop business and manage.

And certainly, in a profession where depression rates have been disproportionately high, it makes a lot of sense to encourage an activity that can boost emotional well-being.

Pat Snyder, J.D., MAPP, is a Certified Professional Co-Active Coach. A complete copy of her study is available at <http://tinyurl.com/awch7yo>.



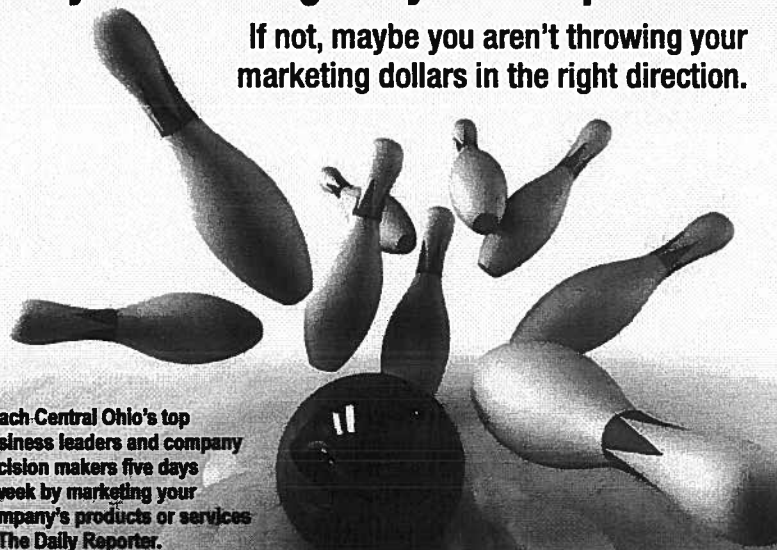
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### Mini Mirth Moments in Small Places

Pair up with a partner, and using any of these prompts, share a workplace story that with some distance seems funny. Then listen while your partner shares a story.

1. It's not easy brewing that first cup of coffee in the morning....
2. I got dressed in such a hurry that I didn't notice till I got to work that....
3. I hadn't cleaned my desk out in years, and when I did, lo and behold....
4. When I looked in the back of the office refrigerator, I couldn't believe what I saw....
5. I have no idea what I was thinking, but I answered the phone, "....."
6. I went all the way back to the office to....
7. I turned around and went all the way back home to....

### **Pesky Problem? Try Humor**

- 1. Break into groups of at least 3-4.**
- 2. Choose a Recorder to take notes and a Reporter to speak for the group.**
- 3. Agree on one Pesky Problem: something that all of you run into over and over again at work.**
- 4. Brainstorm possible solutions, but start out with the craziest, most outrageous solutions first. Have fun with this. Anything goes.**
- 5. Now go back through the list. Which solutions may not be all that dumb?**



## WHAT ARE YOUR SIGNATURE STRENGTHS?

Please circle the five strengths<sup>1</sup> listed below that feel the most like you. (They energize you; they are so much a part of you that you can't help but use them.)

Creativity	Gratitude
Bravery	Love
Love of Learning	Spirituality
Leadership	Humor
Perspective/Wisdom	Appreciation of beauty and excellence
Perseverance	Kindness
Self-Regulation	Forgiveness
Open-Mindedness	Teamwork
Fairness	Social intelligence
Humility/Modesty	Curiosity
Honesty	Hope
Prudence	Enthusiasm

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<sup>1</sup> These characteristics, based on a three-year effort involving 55 social scientists, are described in Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. New York: Oxford University Press 2004. In it is the classification system underlying the study of positive psychology. Identify your strengths with the VIA Me! Character Strengths Profile at <http://www.viame.org/survey/Account/Register>

## Let's Do The Twist

The hallmark of humor is that you're going in one direction and suddenly there's that unexpected twist.

Pair up with a partner and check out these opening lines. See if you can think of a twist to end them with.

1. Friends are like....
2. Discovery is one thing, but....
3. My witness was so bad that....
4. Pulling an all-nighter on a brief is like....
5. Reading that transcript was....