

Quilting Makes Me a Better Lawyer

By **Veronica McMillan** (August 21, 2025)

In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

When I tell colleagues I'm a quilter, they're often surprised. Isn't the practice of law demanding enough? But for me, quilting isn't just a creative outlet — it's a process that has both softened and sharpened essential skills I rely on every day in my legal career.

My free time is often spent piecing together intricate patterns of fabric and thread. Bringing a quilt to life builds greater mindfulness while also requiring patience, precision and the ability to see how small details contribute to the larger whole. As I have discovered, these skills are also essential to the practice of law.



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A Hobby That Stuck

My mother inspired my love of creating. The first time I saw a sewing machine was while watching her craft Christmas stockings at our dining room table. I was hooked. From that moment on, I craved the creative pursuit, carrying it with me into adulthood.

At first, my stitches were uneven and my fabric choices haphazard. But I stuck with it. Over time, I discovered that quilting provided more than just a creative break — it became a space where I could slow down, reflect and process ideas. In law school, crafting balanced the cerebral work of dense casebooks and memo deadlines.

Over the years, what has surprised me most is how the lessons I learned at my sewing table informed my practice of law. The two worlds, though seemingly different, speak to one another in ways I hadn't expected.

Attention to Detail: Precision Matters

One of the obvious parallels between quilting and the practice of law is attention to detail. A quilt with uneven seams or misaligned blocks will never lie flat, no matter how beautiful the fabric. Similarly, a contract with a missing term or unclear language will not seamlessly mesh the parties into a successful working relationship.

In both quilting and law, precision matters. The discipline of squaring each block, double-checking measurements and maintaining a consistent seam allowance has made me more attuned to detail in my legal documents.

Precision in contracts avoids inconsistencies and ambiguities that can open the door to potential problems down the road for clients.

Creative Problem-Solving: Flexibility and Adaptation

Quilt making also fosters creative problem-solving. Sometimes a pattern isn't written well, doesn't come together as expected, or a fabric behaves unpredictably. You may have planned one design, only to realize midway through that it needs to shift.

Time and again, legal work unfolds in the same way. Contracts evolve as negotiations progress. New information arises. Clients change priorities. The ability to remain flexible — and to reimagine solutions under changing circumstances — is essential.

I once found myself piecing a quilt when I realized that a key fabric in my palette wasn't working. I had to redesign the layout on the fly, balancing both the visual flow and structural integrity of the quilt. This mirrors complex litigation, where adaptability and creative thinking can lead to a favorable outcome.

Both pursuits have reinforced the importance of staying open to new approaches and not clinging rigidly to an original plan.

Patience and Perseverance: The Long View

Quilting has taught me patience and perseverance. A large quilt can take weeks or months to complete. There are tedious stretches — cutting endless fabric strips, sewing repetitive rows — that require focus and endurance.

Similarly, a complex transaction can unfold over years. Protracted negotiations, lengthy feasibility periods and entitlement processes, and changing market conditions all demand a long-term mindset. Through quilting, I've learned to value each small step in the process while also keeping my eye on the ultimate goal. Progress may be incremental, but over time, it builds into something substantial.

Throughout my practice, I have habitually turned to my sewing table — using it as both a metaphor and a meditative practice. Quilting reminds me to trust the process, maintain steady effort and appreciate the milestones along the way.

Clarity of Mind: Mindfulness and Balance

Quilting also serves as a valuable counterbalance to the fast pace of legal work. In a profession where we are always on the go — both physically and electronically — having a tactile practice is profoundly restorative.

When I quilt, the rhythmic hum of the sewing machine, the feel of fabric in my hands, the visual pleasure of patterns coming together — all help me clear my mind. I often find that I return to my legal work with renewed clarity and fresh perspective.

This clarity benefits not only me but my clients and colleagues. A lawyer who is centered, focused and creative is far better positioned to serve with excellence.

Leadership and Teamwork Lessons

Quilting has taught me lessons about leadership and collaboration. Many quilt projects are done in community — through quilting bees or guilds. Sharing knowledge, respecting different creative visions and valuing each contributor's strengths are all essential in both quilting circles and legal teams.

Assisting a client in navigating the development process, crafting a contract or hammering out a settlement often means working as a part of or leading a team. Having counsel who can effectively lead and collaborate well within a team is integral to the success of a client's legal matters.

The Person Behind the Task

In the day-to-day demands of legal work, it's easy to forget that behind every corporation, contract or complaint are real people. Emotions — excitement, anxiety, fear, frustration — are always present, even when unstated.

Of all the lessons quilting has offered me, perhaps the most meaningful is its constant reminder of this truth. As I sew, I often think about the person who will receive the quilt — their story, their needs, their moment in time. That same mindfulness helps me bring empathy to my legal work.

Law is not just about precision; it's about people. When we lead with that awareness, we serve with greater clarity and purpose.

Pointers for Other Attorneys

I encourage other attorneys to explore hobbies that balance and enrich their professional lives. Whether it's quilting, woodworking, music, gardening or another creative pursuit, these activities foster patience, creativity, attention to detail and resilience — all essential traits in the legal profession.

They also provide a mental reset, helping us return to our work more engaged and effective. In a field that demands stellar intellectual output, having an input that is joyful, tactile and creative can be transformative.

Embracing hobbies reminds us to be whole people — not just lawyers. The insights we gain from these pursuits ultimately make us better advocates, counselors and colleagues.

Conclusion

I've learned through quilting that slowing down, taking care with details and embracing creative thinking are not luxuries — they're strengths that have provided me with keen insight into my practice of law.

And every time I finish a quilt, I'm reminded that dedication, craftsmanship and heart can produce beautiful — and lasting — results, both in fabric and in law.

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