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DIVERSITY | IN ACTION

Overwhelmed

Devote **meaningful** time to getting your **mind** and your **body right**.

BY KATHERINE FRINK-HAMLETT

Even though I have yet to begin my position as a first-year litigation associate with a major law firm, I get more nervous as the actual date approaches. First, my original start date was pushed back by an entire month so I am extremely concerned about whether I will even have a job. This past summer was a nightmare as I was totally consumed with studying for the bar and literally get palpitations thinking about whether or not I passed.

To make things worse, my nerves were so racked that somehow I gained nearly 10 pounds and I'm fearful that I won't be able to fit into anything decent. I am mixed Dominican and black and the women in my family tend to be a little hippy, so while I am not surprised that most of the weight went straight to my thighs and hips, I am nevertheless completely mortified.

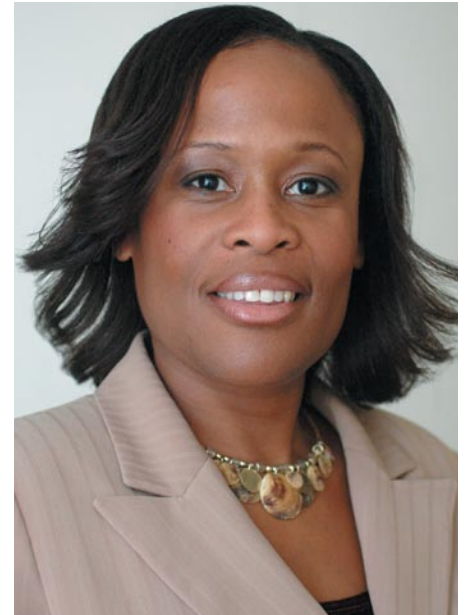
I'm also stressing because while my summer last year at the firm was fine, it wasn't superb. Even though I attended a prestigious law school, I still felt I may

have been treated differently because of my race. I can't point to anything specific but I just felt different.

I know I should be focused on getting myself prepared to practice, perhaps reviewing some litigation materials so that I can perform, but right now I am feeling overwhelmed by the prospects of what I have to deal with. How can I refocus and get myself ready?

Girl, get yourself together. Breathe deeply and recognize your blessings of which there are several: You are a beautiful woman of color who had a fine summer as an associate, graduated from a premier law school, recently sat for the bar exam, will soon be employed with an excellent law firm and extremely well compensated to boot. These are hardly "problems" and quite frankly, many would kill to be in your position. Instead of diving into litigation review, take a moment to devote some meaningful time to getting your mind right.

As you begin your legal career it is oh-so-tempting to hone in on your practice area as the first line of preparation. Especially around this time of the year, associates are frequently presented with a litany of "dos" and "don'ts" for their first year: how to conduct research; when to request assignments;



PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK KOPSTEIN

appropriate partner interaction and the like. Valuable topics to be sure and many of which have been addressed in this column. But it is equally essential not to overlook your physical self and your spiritual well being. How you look and feel are vital components to your overall career success and satisfaction.

Let's start with the body. Forget "hippy" and embrace "curvy." Whether you are a size 4 or 14, your body shape is beautiful and just as it ought to be. With hips or hipless, Stacy London and Clinton Kelly from TLC's "What Not to Wear" present a host of fun and fabulous style options for professional women so that you not only learn how to dress your body, you are given the tools to create an impressive fashion statement that suits your personal style. The fashion duo emphasizes that separates are best—particularly if you are much smaller on top.

For trousers, start with a well-structured, wide-leg (but not super wide) straight trouser that sits on the

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widest part of the hip. This will create the illusion of length and therefore gives you an overall thinner appearance. When fitting your trousers, Clinton underscores the importance of having the waistline tailored to nip any gaps to avoid the “party in the pants” syndrome.

A-line skirts are a curvy girl’s best friend since they help camouflage the hips. Just make sure that the skirt is not too full as it may create the opposite effect.

Suit jackets should hit at the widest part of the hip but “don’t cover the touche—it’s not a good look” and will make your fashion style appear outdated. A similar approach should be applied to professional evening wear. Remember, don’t show too much skin and “chest not breasts” is the rule of thumb. You should also check out their Web site at www.tlc.discovery.com for more fashion tips for those curvy hips (couldn’t resist).

Do yourself another favor: Find a stylist at one or two fashion chains nearby your office. Tell them that you are a first-year associate and you specifically want career pieces to flatter those hips. With retail in the doldrums, they will flock at the opportunity to select as many ensembles as your budget will allow. Be sure to include shoes and accessories for a complete look.

Also, let them know that you would like ongoing assistance so that you can send e-mails when you need to supplement or update your wardrobe. Once you begin working, shopping time is severely curtailed so let the stylists do the bulk of your legwork.

If you have not done so already, consult a nutritionist and make sure you are exercising on a regular basis, minimally three times per week. Regular physical and gynecological examinations (including mammograms) are a must. A 10-pound weight gain within a short period of time simply reflects poor eating choices and a sedentary lifestyle, both of which are toxic to your health and furthermore, detrimental to your career.

It’s hardly a secret that your hours will be long and intense, particularly in a volatile marketplace where more

is expected from everyone. And, certainly as a woman attorney of color, you will undoubtedly confront unique circumstances that will frequently test your nerves. A regular exercise regimen provides the necessary energy to produce a solid work product even over long stretches of intense hours. It is also a great de-stressing mechanism so you avoid potential negative reactions to nonsense and should lessen your anxiety about how you are perceived by your colleagues.

A steady flow of oxygen to the brain increases your mental agility and will aid in your overall performance and sense of confidence. In other words, consistent exercise makes you a better practitioner. By the way, did I mention that you will totally love what happens to your physical appearance?

Your body tone will improve, you should lose inches and weight, and your skin will radiate—need I say more? So be sure to join a gym, preferably near your office and make the time to go, no excuses. Given your hourly requirements, you will probably exercise during the fringe hours, early morning before work or mid-evening, then returning to the office. Try to mix it up a bit—take some classes: Pilates, spin, core strengthening sessions, etc. Or, if your schedule permits, engage in sports activities like tennis, golf or swimming that you may enjoy. Have fun with it and make sure to incorporate regular exercise into your life forever—it’s non-negotiable.

Pay close attention to your eating habits. A good nutritionist will assess your situation, determine what triggers you to overeat or otherwise make bad food choices, then provide reasonable modifications that can be seamlessly integrated into your life. Get this situation on track as soon as possible and treat it with a sense of urgency. Look at it this way: If you fail to address this issue you’ll continue to make poor food choices, thereby jeopardizing your health and weight.

You will be working late over many evenings and frequently ordering dinner that will be consumed while sitting at

your desk. Try to make healthful choices. You don’t want to be the Latino or black associate in the room with a noticeable weight issue; it’s not a good look. At the grave risk of stereotyping (and potential backlash), Latinos and black women tend to be uneven when it comes to working out and weight maintenance. Culturally, our ethnic foods, while scrumptious and delicioso, when consumed too frequently can exacerbate this situation, leading to heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

Your appearance and health are as important to your career as any CLE course or law firm training. When you look good and feel good you’ll be empowered to take control and not be overwhelmed by those events that are outside of your domain. Please take care of yourself—keep your spirit intact, the body in good health and that runway stride!