



# The Fine Line of Funny in Law: Strength, Stress, & Belonging

Character strengths, resilience, mental health, and sustainable legal practice

Across 500 VIA Character Strengths Surveys from students at two law schools, humor ranked on average #2 or #3 out of the 24 character strengths. That finding raises an important question: if humor is one of law students' strongest assets, why is it so often treated as peripheral, risky, or unprofessional?

This session combines original law-student data with research on humor styles, coping, and mental health to explore when humor builds resilience, belonging, and perspective—and when it becomes sarcasm, exclusion, or a mask for distress. Attendees will identify their own humor profile, consider where humor sits in their strengths, and leave with practical ways to use humor more intentionally in law school, legal workplaces, and client-facing settings.

## What your audience receives

- A 60-90 minute interactive presentation
- Access to the VIA Character Strengths Assessment
- Free personalized in-depth reports for participants
- Opportunity to measure humor styles and understand their consequences

## Attendees will leave able to

- Identify the strengths that come most naturally to them and the lower strengths that may surprise them
- Apply character strengths to support law practice, relationships, leadership, recovery, and sustainable performance
- Build practical strategies for resilience
- Assess personal humor style
- Identify how that humor style helps or hinders wellbeing and success.

## Why event planners say yes

- Looks at a much underestimated resource that most people don't identify with lawyers
- Supports self-awareness, critical thinking, professionalism, and sustainable practice
- Introduces a non-standard resource that complements counseling, student affairs, and academic support
- Aligns with Character and Fitness and professional identity formation
- Works well for new and seasoned lawyers

## A note on humor

We explore the importance of humor in two ways: first, as a healthy way to create perspective and reduce stress; second, as a serious feature of legal advocacy. Drawing on Supreme Court oral argument research, participants consider how humor can signal power, hierarchy, pressure, and strategic communication in legal settings. The focus is not "be funnier in court." It is discernment, self-regulation, and judgment about when levity helps, when it hurts, and how to stay grounded under pressure.

## About the Presenter

This is not a standard wellness presentation. Ruth Pearce helps lawyers identify and apply their character strengths in ways that support mental health, burnout prevention, resilience, and the kind of personal development that aligns with Character & Fitness and the values legal educators want to cultivate.



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*Humor framing informed by Tonja Jacobi & Matthew Sag, Taking Laughter Seriously at the Supreme Court, 72 Vanderbilt Law Review 1423 (2019). Resilience & Character Strengths Training informed by [VIA Institute on Character](http://VIA Institute on Character) and [Nervous System Economy](http://Nervous System Economy).*