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Houston Law Grads Discuss Juggling Classes While Raising Families

Texas Lawyer spoke with Brown and emailed Champs for advice for other law students about juggling a strict schedule, coping with overwhelming demands, and tapping into their inner strength and resiliency.

By **Angela Morris** | July 31, 2018



Shartory Brown and Leshia Champ

Houston law graduates Ieshia Champs and Shartory Brown have inspired many people with their stories surviving childhood homelessness and teenage pregnancy and then succeeding in law school while raising multiple kids.

Texas Lawyer spoke with Brown and emailed Champs for advice for other law students about juggling a strict schedule, coping with overwhelming demands, and

tapping into their inner strength and resiliency. Here are their answers, edited for clarity and brevity.

You must be masters at juggling your schedules. Can you explain how you did it, day-to-day?

Shartory Brown, May graduate of South Texas College of Law Houston: It was being able to separate and prioritize things that were important: my family was always No. 1—I made sure I took care of them; school was No. 2 and my job came last. I had my husband staple a calendar on the wall, and I would literally mark my schedule. They knew at a certain time, I would be studying. The key to it all is making sure you stay calm and don't let it overwhelm you. As long as you are calm and you can maintain a level of stability with yourself, then everything else around you will build on the strength and stability.

Ieshia Champs, May graduate of Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law: I had to plan everything! I printed out meal menus and planned our meals for the month, I planned out study time at home and made sure I studied during breaks between classes, I made flash cards that my children used to quiz me while I was cooking or combing my daughters' hair for school the next day, and there were times when I made my children sit as a mock jury or I acted as a professor—preferably Professor April Walker—as I regurgitated what I learned to them that day and asked them questions that I knew they didn't have the answers to. When my children had little league football and cheer practice, I would also sit in my car and study. Everything I did had a time set out.

I imagine that some days, it was overwhelming. How did you go cope with these feelings and keep going?

Brown: Sometimes you may have church leaders you can talk with, a counselor, perhaps your spouse or best friend. My best friend has heard me vent a million and one times. Exercising, going to the gym—do it one hour or 30 minutes a day. I would try to sew little things for my family, something easy. It was something that gave me focus and got my mind off the stress.

Champs: I would go to my closet to cry and pray. I quit law school like 10 times in my head. I would hear my children standing by the door whispering and trying to figure out why I was crying this time. After having a pity party for myself I realized that I was doing this for my children. I wanted them to have a much better life than I did and I wanted to show them that regardless of how hard things may get, just keep pushing. Never give up! Most importantly, I couldn't let my children and God down. I knew that God didn't bring me this far for nothing and if he brought me through tougher things, then he would bring me through this.

A new crop of law students will start school this fall, and while they might not be juggling everything that you've got, they certainly will face their own challenges. What advice would you give them about how to find their own inner strength and resiliency?

Brown: You have to just never give up, no matter how hard it gets. Just do your best. If this is your passion, follow your heart. Your heart is going to lead you where you need to be. Stay focused on your goal. It's just about whether you're willing to put in 100 percent, because if you put in your all, you will receive a reward.

Champs: Be mindful to what's going on around you. By doing this you will be able to observe your own thoughts and allow them to control your emotions—because you will have them! If you are able to observe and control your emotions, you will be able to respond to them effectively. Remember that law school is a marathon, not a race. Prepare and practice in the same manner that you would a marathon, and once you cross the finish line you will notice that all of your hard work paid off.

Angela Morris is a freelance journalist. Follow her on Twitter at @AMorrisReports