

Speaker 1: Welcome to the Extra Mile Podcast for Bar Exam Takers. There are no traffic jams along the Extra Mile when you're studying for your bar exam. Now, your host, Jackson Mumey, owner of the Celebration Bar Review.

Jackson Mumey: Well hey everybody, welcome to episode thirty-six of the Extra Mile Podcast for Bar Exam Takers. This is Jackson Mumey. I'm so glad you're with me today for what I think is a really informative and interesting episode. We're going to be looking today at, I guess the best way to put it would be, all of the things that you thought you knew about good studying for the bar exam. I'm going to tell you to forget what you know about good study habits for the bar exam.

It's not just my own opinion. I'm going to be looking at a piece of academic educational research that was done back in 2010 that continues to be proven to be effective, and proven to make a real difference for students at all ages, including bar exam takers. I think you're going to find this to be really really helpful information to you. I'm excited to have you with me.

If this is your first time on the Extra Mile podcast, welcome, we're glad to have you with us. You can catch up on all of our past episodes. We produce these twice a week and you can catch them on iTunes, where you could also subscribe to the podcast, or you could go to our website at celebrationbarreview.com. Just click on the word "podcast." You'll see the show notes and you can subscribe from there. We would love to have you be a subscriber, also love to get your honest ratings and reviews, love to get that feedback as we're going forward.

Also want to let you know, before we get into the meat of today's episode, that I'll be doing a free, live master class on Thursday at 3:00 pm Eastern. The title of the class is, "How to Make the Next Bar Exam Your Last Bar Exam." It's the four steps you have to take to pass the bar. It's information that I think you're going to find very helpful, very useful, certainly actionable. It's a ninety-minute session, lots of interaction and love to have you join me for that.

As I said, it's totally free, but you do have to register for your seat, because we do limit the attendance. You could register one of two ways. If you like or prefer texting, you can text the phrase, "nextbarexam," all one word, nextbarexam, to 33444. So just text nextbarexam to 33444, or you can go on line to celebrationbarreview.com/webinar and register that way, so celebrationbarreview.com/webinar and register that way. Look forward to seeing you Thursday at 3:00 pm Eastern. That would be 12:00 noon Pacific time for this live master class, "How to Make the Next Bar Exam Your Last Bar Exam."

As I'm recording today, results continue to come out. We just got Georgia results. I thought it was a very tough test in Georgia. I've not yet seen the official pass rate, but I'm guessing it's fairly modest, pretty low rate. We did pretty well

with our students and we've got some interviews coming up with at least one of those passing Georgia students. I think you're going to love to hear her story. We'll be talking with Anna in an upcoming episode. Congratulations to everyone that passed the Georgia bar. To all of our students, of course, we're very excited for their results.

Also in upcoming episodes, I'm going to be doing some "Ask Jackson," kind of a different thing, where I'm going to take some questions that I've been asked from people over the last few weeks and months and talk a little bit about those. Of course, we've still got results due in Texas, New York, New Jersey, and then California, so we've still got the really big states waiting on those results to come out. A lot going on, I know that many of you that are listening are waiting for your results, and really wish you the very best.

If you are planning to take the bar exam, or need to take the bar exam, also invite you to join our private Facebook group called "The Extra Mile." It's a great opportunity for you to get together in a community of current and past bar takers, to talk about whatever is on your mind regarding the bar exam. I'll have some details at the end of today's episode for how you can request your free membership in that private community.

For now, we're going to jump into this lecture on how to really change all of the ways that you've been thinking about how to study for the bar exam. We're going to be talking about things like, where to study, when to study. Should you memorize? How long can you keep the information in your head? What are the things that work best for studying and retaining information?

You're going to be surprised at what the research shows, because truthfully, in the legal profession and legal education, that's probably been one of the areas that has been slowest to respond to what we now know about the pedagogy or the teaching methodology of best practices. Unfortunately, we still teach most of law school and the bar pretty much the same way it was done back in the day. When I say "back in the day," I mean back in the 1800s. Not really a bastion of progressiveness, which is, I think, one of the reasons that we're more successful, perhaps, than some of our other fellow bar review companies, because we've really embraced those technologies and approaches in ways that perhaps they haven't.

I think you'll be kind of surprised at what you have to hear. As always, I invite you to listen with an open mind and feel free to comment. There's a place in the show notes where you can let me know your thoughts about it. Also some links to the article that I reference in this recording.

Let's go ahead and jump into today's episode and find out about those good study habits that you thought you had, and why they may not be so good for you after all.

Speaker 3:

Welcome to Celebration Bar Review. In this video message, I want to talk about an article that was recently published in the New York Times in September of 2010. It was by Benedict Carey. The title of the article, which is really the title also of this video message, is to "Forget What You Know About Good Study Habits." The essence of this article is that we all have heard a variety of prescriptions for how people should study, how they should learn, how they should approach the learning itself.

Over a period of time, scientists have done a great deal of cognitive research and they have begun to discover that there are some techniques that really can change what matters most how a student learns from studying. Now this is work that I've been involved with for a number of years. It forms most of the basis of the pedagogy of the Celebration Bar Review course, so I'm excited when I can read in the New York Times that what we've been doing for a number of years is, in fact, what scientists are saying should be done. I think it's quite different than what a lot of courses do or maybe what even you've done, or thought you were going to do, in terms of studying for the bar.

I want to go through this article with you, and share some of the findings, and give you some sense of how we try to apply them. To begin with, the article says that there are a number of things that we would think of as being common wisdom about study habits that are just flat wrong. For example, one of the things you hear a lot is that you should stick to a single study location. I think it's good to have a habit of studying, but one of the things that we've found, and the scientists now have some basic data that supports the position, is that alternating the room where you study will improve your retention of material.

More important to me than just changing the location, because certainly you can do that relatively easily, but the studies also show that studying distinct but related skills or concepts in one sitting is better than just focusing on a single thing. The way that we try to do that in our course, is that we have you read through a body of material, or listen to a lecture on a body of material, or do a set of questions, and I'll come to the question practice in a moment in more detail, but the idea is that we want to get you through a broader study than just simply memorizing the rote rules, and there's lots of courses that just want you to memorize the rules. The idea is that if you're studying these distinct or related skills, then you're going to be more effective if you study that way.

What about this idea of studying in a particular place? Part of the reason that the scientists are finding that it's better to study in a variety of places, is that this notion of studying where it's quiet, a study room or a corner of the library, is directly contrary to what the evidence is telling us. What we're finding now, in experiments going back into the late 1970s, but now really getting currency, I think, is that students who study, for example, vocabulary words in different rooms, one that's windowless and cluttered, the other, there was a modern view on the courtyard, those students did far better on the test than those

students who studied the words twice sitting in the same room, and their studies confirm those findings.

Why is that? Well, in effect, what we're learning is that the brain makes these subtle associations between what it's studying and what the background sensations are at the time. For those of you that want to study in a Starbucks, there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, breaking it up, varying where you study and when you study is fine as long as you have a study plan. The idea is that the brain will start to make associations, neural associations, between the activity in the room or the color of the walls, or where you are and what's happening with the material. It enhances or enriches the information, and that will slow down this notion of forgetting.

I think more important than that, however, is the idea that varying the type of material that you study in a single sitting will leave a deeper impression than if you just look at one particular item. We know this in watching how athletes work out, that they routinely mix a variety of different skills or tests in one practice. Musicians do the same thing. They will mix musical pieces and scales and so on.

The advantage of doing it this way, according to work that was done and reported on in the *Journal of Applied Cognitive Psychology*, is that when children, and they gave the children, fourth graders, a test, to study repeated examples of one single equation, and then go to the next type of equation or calculation, that's one group. The other group was given mixed problem sets, which have all of the different calculation types grouped together. Both of these groups of kids solved problems along the way.

A day later, the researchers came back, and they gave the students a test on the material with new problems of the same type. The children that studied the mixed test, the variety, did twice as well as the others, scoring 77 to 38 percent over the others. They found the same results consistently in experiments with adults and younger children.

Here's the point; mixed practice means that each problem is different from the last one, so you have to learn the appropriate procedure, just like you have to do on the test. That's why when we give you sample questions to practice, we give you a different variety of questions, approaches, and material, rather than the same question over and over again. Some of you are big fans of the computer diagnostic programs that are out there. I hate to tell you, but they are really smoke and mirrors. There's not a great deal behind them, in terms of the science or the pedagogy behind them. They simply keep repeating the same thing actually time and time again.

The net effect of that, is that it reduces this concept of mixed practice. I think that the way we formed our questions and our practice sessions is designed to

build on this concept, that you're learning the material, you'll learn it in application rather than rote memorization.

There's another assumption that's made about studying that this article debunks, and that is that intensive immersion is the best way to master a particular body of work. There's a psychologist, Nate Cornell, at Williams College, the lead author of one of these studies, who said that the brain picks up deeper patterns when it sees assortments. He was talking about paintings, it's picking up what's similar and what's different about them subconsciously.

The point is that this idea of cramming leading to better test results really doesn't work. What the exam and what the results seem to tell us is that jam-packing a brain, and they use a great example, they say it's akin to speed packing a cheap suitcase, holds the load for a short while and then most everything falls out. The reality is the students not only can't remember the material, it's like they've never seen it before, according to a psychologist who was involved in the study.

In other words, if you're cramming, you're not likely to keep the material, and very few people can cram as much information as a bar exam requires. The neural suitcase, if you will, has to hold the material for a much longer period of time. How do you do that?

It's really the concept that I call "step learning," or "step repetition." Here's what the article says, and I'm quoting: "An hour of study tonight, an hour on the weekend, another session a week from now, such a recall or spacing, improves later recall without requiring students to put in more overall study effort, or to pay more attention, dozens of studies have found."

That's correct. That's the work that I saw back at Harvard with Project Zero. It continues to be accurate, and so for those of you that think you're going to cram your way to success on the bar exam, empirically, the results say you will not. It's a very poor approach.

What's the better approach? You should study periodically over a longer period of time. That's why we create a study plan that generally works on the theory that you'll study ten to twenty hours a week, typically for four to six months. If you have to go a little bit more than that for a shorter period of time you can do so, but the concept of six weeks of hard studying for twelve or fourteen hours a day, is in effect, packing that neural suitcase like it's a cheap bag and it's going to simply pop open.

That's part of the approach. The other part is that the brain tends to be self-reinforcing. The article says it this way: "Forgetting is a friend of learning." When you forget something, then it gives you the opportunity to relearn and to do so effectively the next time you see it, and that's what spaced learning does.

How do you do that? One way is to give testing itself, practice tests or quizzes as a learning tool, not merely assessment. I would say that this is one of the things I most commonly comment on to the students. They'll say to me, "Well I took your practice tests and I got X percentage right," or, "I wrote these essays and got X percentage of the points on it." That misses the idea. They're really not there to assess, they're there to help you learn. That's something I've said really from the beginning. It's fundamentally working on the way that the information is being stored in your brain that makes it accessible in the future.

There's an analogy here to the uncertainty principle in physics, but it's way beyond my capacity to understand it. Essentially, the point is that testing not only measures knowledge, but actually changes it. You get smarter as you test, so I think it's very helpful.

Effectively, this kind of standardized testing or testing approach, we're told in the article and through the research now, is one of the most powerful learning tools we have. Is it a difficult tool? Sure it is. The harder it is to remember something, though, the harder it is to forget it. This is what we call a "desirable difficulty." When we make these questions difficult, it's really to help you get a grasp of the material. If you study with a real life problem, a fact pattern, whether it's a hypothetical on a bar or essay question, or it's a multiple choice, multi-state question, you're really learning from the application. The difficulty of the principle is what makes it possible to learn the underlying principle and become more effective.

What does all this amount to? There are really several different things that these articles and these studies are now saying, and that the main stream press I think is starting to pick up on. If you alternate study environments, if you mix content, if you space study sessions, if you do self-testing, all of those will turn students into being more successful when it comes to learning and knowledge. That's ultimately what the bar exam tests.

You see, if your basic approach and assumption is the bar exam will test your memorization capabilities, really, you should go take a memory course. That's what you need, not a bar course, but reality tells us something quite different. You need to know how to be able to use the law that you've learned in school or in your practice. The process of learning doesn't come through memorization. That's why a course that's built on cramming and memorizing is ultimately ineffective, even if it's the best marketed course out there, or the biggest course.

The most successful course, and empirically, over many many years now, our pass rates are so much higher because we use the kinds of concepts and approaches that really help people learn. I invite you to look at this article in the New York Times. I think you'll see a lot more written about these subjects. Typically, when the Times picks up something like this it gets a wide play. There's a lot of research and a lot of studies out there that are consistently

telling us the same thing. Cognitive real learning is never memorizing, it's never the rote memorization and recitation of facts and information. I think if you can start with that premise and build from there, you're going to be much better off and much further ahead.

If that makes sense to you, and if it's the kind of approach that you think you'd be interested in, I hope you'll investigate further into Celebration Bar Review. If you've got questions or comments, as always, I invite you to contact me and let me know what you think about that. For now, my neural suitcase is packed fairly tightly and I'm going to try not to let it all spill out. I wish you the very best as you continue your studies for the bar exam. Thanks for watching.

Jackson Mumey:

Well that wraps up today's episode. Thanks so much for listening. If you'd like to be part of our Extra Mile for Bar Exam Takers' private Facebook group, just check the show notes. You'll find a link in which you can request an invitation and we'll see you along the Extra Mile.

Speaker 1:

Thanks for listening to the Extra Mile Podcast for Bar Exam Takers, at www.celebrationbarreview.com.