

Death is only one
breath away: how
michael brock
changes in 'the street
lawyer'



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Once people realize that death is very real, and that any breath that they take could be their last, they change. A prime example of this is Michael Brock in John Grisham's *The Street Lawyer*. Michael began the story as a workaholic whose main priority was to bill as many hours in his office as possible. After a traumatizing experience in which he was nearly killed, he became a completely different man. Michael's near-death experience changed him from a workaholic to a kinder man who was less focused on work, and eventually to a selfless street lawyer.

Michael Brock began the story as an egotistical workaholic whose top priority was billing as many hours in his office as possible. Although he was married, Michael left no time for his wife, prioritizing his work over her. He said, " I worked 15 hours a day, six days a week...billing lots of hours is more important than a happy wife" (Grisham 32). Michael is clearly a workaholic, working 15 hours six days a week and leaving only 9 on a daily basis for normal activities. The average person works about half of the time that he does. He not only prioritizes working, but he says that it is more important to him that his wife's happiness. This qualifies Michael as an extreme workaholic, with little in the way of a life outside of his office.

Although Michael began the story as an extreme workaholic, he was still susceptible to a change in character, as evident by his reaction to a near-death experience. While working at the firm one day, he and a few co-workers were held hostage by a homeless individual by the name of DeVon Hardy. He could have killed them all that day, but they all managed to escape unharmed, including Michael. After this traumatizing experience, his perspective on life changed. Michael explained his change through this

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quote: " In the old days, Claire's absence for the weekend would have given me guilt-free grounds to live at the office. Sitting by the fire, I was repulsed by that" (Grisham 73). Coming face-to-face with death in the hostage situation helped Michael to understand that spending all of his time working was ridiculous, as it was meaningless. His reputation as a workaholic faded, and he began to spend less of his time at the office and used that time to help others. One example of this was when Mordecai Green, as street lawyer, called Michael asking if he would volunteer at a homeless shelter. He said, "' We're short on manpower. Do you have a few hours to spare?'...'The shelters and soup kitchens are packed, and we don't have enough volunteers'...'Okay, where do I go'" (Grisham 73-74). Michael's willingness to spend his time helping out at a homeless shelter instead of billing hours at the office is a tremendous change from the beginning of the book, when he spent all of his time at the office. His near-death experience changed him from a workaholic who spent most of his time at the office to a man who was willing to spend his time elsewhere, helping others.

After he began to spend more time away from his office, Michael Brock became a selfless street lawyer, and showed that by sacrificing his old lifestyle in order to help others. he had spent that last few years of his life with a fancy car, lots of money, and an expensive apartment, before settling for much less to become a street lawyer. "' How much is the new salary?' ' Thirty thousand a year'" (Grisham 138). Michael Brock's selflessness is shown by the fact that he took a \$90, 000 pay cut to work the much less glorious job of being a street lawyer. However, he also needed to be very flexible in order to work his new job. He was working for homeless

individuals, so he worked free of charge, something that was hard to do in many instances. The book reads, “ We decided to take things one day at a time. Megan would drive Ruby to a suburban Motel, one I would pay for, and deposit her there for Sunday night” (Grisham 327). Michael gave up his money and his time to help Ruby, a homeless drug addict, get a safe place to spend the night. This showed his true new self, being selfless and working a street lawyer. By the end of the story, Michael was a selfless street lawyer, changed from being a workaholic, as evident by everything that he gives up just to help others in a more meaningful way.

Throughout John Grisham’s *The Street Lawyer*, Michael Brock changed from workaholic to a man who spent his time helping others and eventually to a selfless street lawyer. Near the beginning of the book, Michael was working 15 hour days and had no time for anything else. However, after his traumatizing experience with DeVon Hardy, Michael took some time off of work and spent it by volunteering at homeless shelters. His experiences at these homeless shelters changed him, and he grew to love helping the homeless, a trait with eventually had Michael quit his job to work as a street lawyer. His selflessness was shown here because he took a \$90, 000 pay cut and worked in much less favorable conditions. Through a near-death experience, Michael changed from being a workaholic to volunteering his time away and eventually to becoming a selfless street lawyer.