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**PROGRAM MATERIALS**

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## **Essential Skills for YOUR Mental Health During and After a Pandemic**

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**[www.celesq.com](http://www.celesq.com)**

**5301 North Federal Highway, Suite 180, Boca Raton, FL 33487**  
**Phone 561-241-1919      Fax 561-241-1969**

# Essential Skills for YOUR Mental Health During and After a Pandemic

May 6, 2020

**SPEAKERS:**

DR. SHARON MEIT ABRAHAMS, LEGAL TALENT ADVISORS, LLC

JOSEPH E. ANKUS, ESQ., ATTORNEY MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION, INC.

DR. MARSHA BROWN, MARSHA D. BROWN, PH.D., P.A.



## Dr. Sharon Meit Abrahams

Dr. Sharon Meit Abrahams is a legal talent development expert with over 25 years of experience in success coaching for attorneys and executing high impact programs for law firms. She has created and implemented firm wide initiatives that help attorneys maximize their productivity while maintaining engagement. As the Director of Professional Development for three major firms she has handled every aspect of an attorneys' firm life from onboarding and integration, through mentoring and substantive training to succession planning and retirement. Dr. Abrahams has published three books with the American Bar Association and regularly publishes articles for Thomson Reuters and American Legal Media on professional and business development. [www.legaltalentadvisors.com](http://www.legaltalentadvisors.com)



## Joe Ankus, Esq

Joe is an attorney, legal recruiter and nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor. He has almost 30 years of professional experience as a practitioner and trusted educator to lawyers, law firms, law schools, lawyer assistance programs and the Florida Bar. He earned his B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications and his J.D. from the University of Florida Levin College of Law. Joe trains legal professionals in Mental Health First Aid and recruiting on a nationwide basis. He enjoys using his training and experience to help others. To learn more, please visit [attorneymentalhealtheducationinc.com](http://attorneymentalhealtheducationinc.com).



**Joseph E. Ankus, Esq.**



## Dr. Marsha D. Brown

Dr. Brown is a Florida Licensed Psychologist with over 13 years of experience in the evaluation and treatment of children, adults, and families across numerous settings. She owns and operates a private practice that provides a variety of forensic and clinical psychological services. Forensically, she conducts evaluations for criminal and family court cases. Clinically, she teaches individuals and groups working in high-stress occupations to avoid career fatigue and maintain mental wellness by improving stress management and implementing self-care. To learn more about Dr. Brown's work, visit [www.drmarshabrown.com](http://www.drmarshabrown.com).



# A Brief Look At The Challenges...

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2016 landmark ABA and Hazelden survey of 13,000 attorneys found that approximately:

- 21%-36% are problem drinkers
- 28% are depressed
- 23% are stressed
- 19% are anxious
- And this is NOT during a pandemic...

# Overview

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- Crisis management for yourself
- Effective communication
- Using your emotional intelligence (EQ)
- EQ for managing relationships
- Causes and effects of anxiety
- Stress management and self-care practices

# Lawyers Understand Crisis Management

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- Gray is a “...color intermediate between black and white...”
- Few things in life are binary. Life requires us to manage nuance using our own powers of introspection and our external life experiences.
- From the first day of law school, we were trained to work under stress and within gray areas.
- Our legal education is excellent preparation for today’s new challenges.
- The Socratic Method is valuable! Thinking on our feet. Answering under pressure. Working with rapidly changing situations.



# Lawyers Understand Crisis Management

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- Trials, transactions and transcripts. The practice of law mirrors life's ups and downs.
- Change is a constant and is today's "new normal."
- We can't fight it; we have to work with it.
- Crises have more immediate questions than answers.
- We can operate within the parameters of "it depends" and be more comfortable than most.
- Adaptability is key- "Permission To Treat The Witness As Hostile!"
- Apply client crisis management skills to help ourselves during COVID-19.

# The Communication Process

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- It's easy to take communication for granted. We do it every day- some of us are more effective than others.
- Especially in crisis, heightened awareness of ourselves and with who we communicate is essential.
- We are social by nature and distancing is a new experience.
- We have been communicating for thousands of years.
- We can use the lessons of the past to help us now.

# The Communication Process

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- Please remember if you don't have something nice to say, don't say it, email it, tweet it, text it or post it.
- Vent to a close and trusted confidant- not to the world at large.
- Before you post on-line, ask if you'd be comfortable posting the same thing on a neon billboard outside your house.
- There may be repercussions for “tone-deaf” or angry outbursts during the pandemic.
- Currently, some prefer not to communicate as much as they once may have.
- Respect others need for privacy and self-reflection so long as they are otherwise O.K.

# The Communication Process

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- If you need personal time or a break from interaction, say so without fear or reservation.
- People are not mind readers- we have to tell them what we are thinking, feeling and experiencing.
- Ask for what you need. Give what others need. Both will help you.
- We all handle stress and change differently so adapt your communication styles to match.
- Consider the receiver of your message!

# Think Before You Act...Not After!

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- Regarding messages- in any form- consider that:
- It is helpful to know your own attitudes and culture before sharing a message.
- You can't "unring the bell" once a message is sent.
- Before communicating ask: "Am I in the right frame of mind to do this? How can my message be interpreted?"
- Know when to email, text or call. There is a difference!
- These strategies are designed to help you and those you are communicating with.



# I say “Potato” and You say....

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- Our life experiences and opinions are integral parts of our messaging and our message itself.
- It is normal to think that everyone sees the world just like we do!
- News Flash: We are ALL DIFFERENT- especially in a crisis!
- Example: What you think is “fair” may not be what I think is “fair”.
- Determining “fairness” keep courts busy and lawyers billing.
- Recognizing these differences will help keep you focused and calmer.

# Maintaining Effective Communication

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With colleagues, teams and clients:

- 1) Check first to make sure they are O.K. before discussing work and, if possible, try to help them;
- 2) Be compassionate, concise, clear and consistent;
- 3) For business meetings, create and follow agendas and action lists for focus;
- 4) Remain adaptable under changing circumstances.
- 5) Practice patience. Live forgiveness. For you. For them.

# Emotional Intelligence Defined

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- The ability to identify and manage one's own emotions,
- Identifying and working with the emotions of others.
- There is no validated psychometric test or scale for emotional intelligence.
- It has been proven to more important than IQ in achieving business success.
- Employers are using EQ tests in the recruiting process.

# Why is EQ Important Now?

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- New stressors are all around – situations that have never existed before
- Important to identify the emotions that are being triggered – fear, loneliness, anxiety about job, health, etc.
- With knowledge our emotions can be better managed – self control is a key factor for a healthy mental state
- Empathy is critical these days – everyone is struggling
- Need to develop a new style for social skills – whether an introvert or an extravert everything is different now

<b>Personal Competence</b>	<b>Self Awareness –</b> Understand own moods and emotions	<b>Self Management –</b> Control over emotions, think before acting
<b>Social Competence</b>	<b>Social Awareness –</b> Develop a rapport with people	<b>Relationship Management –</b> Understand other's emotions and treat them as they wish to be treated



# Managing Relationships

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- Ability to influence positive connections – take the lead on planning calls, video meeting and some fun time
- Maintaining morale with immediate team – everyone is struggling with the new normal of working alone
- Setting and respecting boundaries - once they're identified, they have to be made known to others and enforced.
- Knowing when to offer help – some are afraid to ask for help as it might show weakness

# A Look at Anxiety

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## Understanding the Causes and Effects of Anxiety

### What is Anxiety?

- A reaction to stress

### What causes anxiety?

### Anxiety vs. Stress

### How does anxiety affect our body?

- short-term effects vs. long-term effects
- physical, emotional, cognitive

# Common Causes of Anxiety

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- A PANDEMIC!
- Stress at work and changes to the work environment
- Stress in a personal relationship such as marriage.
- Financial stress
- Stress from an emotional trauma such as the death of a loved one.
- Stress from a serious medical illness.
- Use of an illicit drug, such as cocaine.

# The Effects of Anxiety (Short-Term)

1. Headaches, jaw clenching or pain
2. Gritting, grinding teeth
3. Stuttering or stammering
4. Tremors, trembling of lips or hands
5. Neck ache, back pain, muscle spasms
6. Light headedness, faintness, dizziness
7. Ringing, buzzing or popping sounds
8. Frequent blushing, sweating
9. Cold or sweaty hands or feet
10. Dry mouth, problems swallowing
11. Frequent colds, infections
12. Rashes, itching, hives
13. Frequent unexplained “allergy” attacks
14. Heartburn, stomach pain, nausea
15. Excess belching, flatulence
16. Constipation, diarrhea
17. Difficulty breathing, frequent sighing
18. Panic attacks
19. Chest pain, palpitations, rapid pulse
20. Frequent urination

# The Effects of Anxiety (Long-Term)

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Prolonged anxiety leads to:

- Mental and physical health problems
- Compassion fatigue
- Absenteeism
- Intentions to quit/checking out
- High turnover
- Decrease in quality of provided services



# What is Stress?

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- Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response
- The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses
- Stress is a normal part of life
- Even positive life changes such as a promotion, a mortgage, or the birth of a child produce stress.

# What Can We Do to Help Ourselves?

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## Stress management

“encompasses techniques intended to equip a person with effective coping mechanisms for dealing with psychological stress.”

Source: Psychologist World

# What Can We Do to Help Ourselves?

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## Stress Management

- identify triggers
- recognize signs

## Self-care

- finding the unique methods and practices that decrease stress
- daily reset button
- mind, body, emotions
- exercise, meditation, hobbies, writing, talking
- schedule and commit to it

# To Maintain Mental Health

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- Lawyers have always lived with crises, so they have the tools to manage personal crises
- It's important to communicate with others when in crisis
- Use Emotional Intelligence. It's key to dealing with others
- Identify your stress and anxiety
- Institute self care routines

# Resources

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- Lawyer Assistance Programs via state bar
  - [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer\\_assistance/resources/lap\\_programs\\_by\\_state/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/lap_programs_by_state/)
- Employee assistance programs by firm
- Mental health coverage through your insurance plan

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Dr. Sharon Meit Abrahams, [Sharon@legaltalentadvisors.com](mailto:Sharon@legaltalentadvisors.com)

Joseph E. Ankus, Esq., [info@attorneymentalhealtheducationinc.com](mailto:info@attorneymentalhealtheducationinc.com)

Dr. Marsha Brown, [drmarshadbrown@gmail.com](mailto:drmarshadbrown@gmail.com)