



PROGRAM MATERIALS

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Ethics Under Pressure: Trauma-Informed Strategies for Difficult Client Interactions

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PRESENTS

**Ethics Under Pressure:
Trauma-Informed Strategies for
Difficult Client Interactions**

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Communication Under Pressure

Why Trauma-Informed Communication Is an Ethical Competency

**Effective communication is not measured by what the lawyer says.
It is measured by what the client understands.**

One of the greatest misconceptions about attorney-client communication is that effective communication simply means transmitting information. We return phone calls. We send status updates. We explain the law. We answer questions.

But effective communication is not measured by what the lawyer says.

It is measured by what the client understands.

This distinction becomes especially important when clients are frightened, angry, grieving, overwhelmed, or emotionally activated. Under stress, many clients struggle to process information, regulate emotions, or consider options objectively. They may interrupt, become argumentative, withdraw from the conversation, or react in ways that seem disproportionate to the situation at hand.

These reactions are often frustrating for attorneys. Yet they are also entirely human.

Trauma-informed communication recognizes that emotions influence a person's ability to receive and process information. Rather than viewing these reactions as resistance or disrespect, trauma-informed lawyers ask a different question:

"What does this client need in order to hear what I have to say?"

That shift in perspective often transforms difficult conversations.

Importantly, trauma-informed communication is not about lowering professional standards, avoiding difficult conversations, or becoming a therapist for your client. Rather, it provides practical strategies that help attorneys fulfill their ethical obligations while maintaining professionalism, appropriate boundaries, and effective representation.

Communication Is More Than Talking

Model Rule of Professional Conduct 1.4 is commonly referred to as the Communication Rule. Most lawyers recognize that it requires timely communication with clients. Yet the Rule asks for something more significant than simply providing updates.

Rule 1.4 requires lawyers to communicate in a manner that allows clients to participate meaningfully in their own representation.

Clients cannot make informed decisions if they are unable to understand the information being presented.

For that reason, effective communication requires attorneys to consider not only what they say, but also when they say it, how they say it, and whether the client is emotionally capable of receiving the information.

Communication under pressure therefore becomes an ethical competency rather than simply an interpersonal skill.

Most lawyers have experienced clients who:

- become angry at the legal system
- repeatedly interrupt
- reject legal advice
- become overwhelmed during meetings
- fixate on issues unrelated to the representation
- expect immediate responses at all hours

These reactions frequently occur because the client's nervous system is activated.

When individuals perceive threat, uncertainty, or loss of control, their brains naturally prioritize emotional survival over logical reasoning.

As a result, clients may:

- hear only portions of the conversation
- misinterpret neutral statements
- become argumentative
- insist on certainty where none exists
- focus on emotion rather than information

Recognizing these predictable responses allows attorneys to respond strategically rather than personally.

The client's behavior is information - not necessarily disrespect.

That does not excuse inappropriate conduct.

It simply provides insight into what may be driving the interaction.

Communication Under Pressure Requires Self-Regulation

An often-overlooked aspect of attorney-client communication is the lawyer's own emotional state.

When clients become angry, frightened, or demanding, attorneys experience their own physiological reactions. Heart rate increases. Muscles tighten. Patience decreases. Defensive responses become more likely.

Secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, heavy caseloads, and chronic stress all make thoughtful communication more difficult.

For that reason, communication under pressure begins with the attorney rather than the client.

Before responding, consider three questions:

- Am I reacting or responding?
- What emotion is driving this interaction?
- What does this client need in order to understand my advice?

A brief pause before speaking often changes the entire conversation.

*"Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response."
- Viktor Frankl*

That space is where effective - and ethical - communication begins.

The Ethical Connection

Throughout this program we examine five common attorney-client interactions through the lens of Model Rule 1.4.

Although each situation is different, the same principles consistently emerge.

Effective lawyers:

- acknowledge emotion before offering explanation
- communicate with clarity rather than defensiveness
- establish healthy professional boundaries
- avoid unnecessary escalation
- explain legal issues in language clients can understand
- create opportunities for meaningful client participation

Trauma-informed communication does not replace legal competence. It strengthens it.

Nor does it replace professionalism. It supports it.

Ultimately, communication under pressure is not about finding the perfect words. It is about creating the conditions in which meaningful communication can occur.

When clients understand, participate, and make informed decisions, lawyers have done far more than improve client service. They have fulfilled one of the profession's core ethical responsibilities.

Trauma-Informed Client Practice

practical phrases, checklists, and reminders for real client conversations

Core skill set: Acknowledge → Slow down → Clarify → Guide. Tone matters. Calm, steady, respectful language works better than defensiveness, over-explaining, or trying to “win” the moment.

What trauma may look like • Anger or escalation • Urgency / over-talking • Shutdown / withdrawal • Speaking over you • Unrealistic expectations • Emotion that seems “bigger” than the moment	Before you respond, check yourself ☐ Am I regulated enough to respond instead of react? ☐ Have I acknowledged what the client is experiencing? ☐ Do I need to slow the moment down? ☐ Do I need a boundary here? ☐ Have I clarified the next step or process?
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Useful Language for Common Client Moments

Situation	Suggested language	Reminder
Angry client	“I can hear how upsetting this is. Let’s take a step back for a moment, and I’ll walk you through where things stand and what we can do next.”	<i>Do not say “calm down.”</i>
Interrupted / spoken over	“Let me finish this thought, and then I’ll come right back to you so I can give you accurate guidance.”	<i>Reclaim structure calmly.</i>
Trauma dumping	“That sounds like a lot to carry. I want to make sure I can help you with your case, so can we come back to the legal issue in front of us?”	<i>Acknowledge → Redirect.</i>
Settlement disappointment	“I understand that this feels deeply disappointing. Let’s slow this down and walk through the offer, the risks, and your options.”	<i>Guide, do not persuade too quickly.</i>
After-hours boundary	“I’m not available for non-emergency communication after business hours, but I will review this and respond tomorrow. If it is a true emergency, please email me marked urgent.”	<i>Boundaries are structure, not rejection.</i>

Managing Client Expectations: A Practical Checklist

Stage	Checklist	Helpful language
Initial consult	☐ Avoid definitive statements ☐ Introduce uncertainty early ☐ Explain that assessment may evolve	“This is what we know now — but things may change as we learn more.”
Early case stage	☐ Explain how value is determined ☐ Distinguish emotional harm from legal value	“What someone has been through and how the law values it are not always the same.”
Throughout case	☐ Reinforce expectations in small moments ☐ Identify strengths and risks ☐ Do not stay silent about weaknesses	“This helps your case here — but this is still a challenge.”
Pre-settlement	☐ Preview likely range ☐ Connect back to prior conversations	“As we’ve discussed, there are both strengths and risks here.”
Settlement talk	☐ Acknowledge emotion first ☐ Reinforce prior messaging ☐ Guide — do not rush to convince	“I know this may feel disappointing — and it is consistent with what we’ve been seeing.”

Quick reminders

- No surprises = better conversations.
- Say it early, say it often.
- You do not need to agree with the client to acknowledge their experience.
- Predictability lowers distress.

One thing I will try this week:

A good boundary is clear, calm, and kind. Different situations call for different words, but the core skills stay the same: acknowledge, steady, clarify, guide.

Model Rules of Professional Conduct

Rule 1.1: Competence

A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation.

Comment

Legal Knowledge and Skill

[1] In determining whether a lawyer employs the requisite knowledge and skill in a particular matter, relevant factors include the relative complexity and specialized nature of the matter, the lawyer's general experience, the lawyer's training and experience in the field in question, the preparation and study the lawyer is able to give the matter and whether it is feasible to refer the matter to, or associate or consult with, a lawyer of established competence in the field in question. In many instances, the required proficiency is that of a general practitioner. Expertise in a particular field of law may be required in some circumstances.

[2] A lawyer need not necessarily have special training or prior experience to handle legal problems of a type with which the lawyer is unfamiliar. A newly admitted lawyer can be as competent as a practitioner with long experience. Some important legal skills, such as the analysis of precedent, the evaluation of evidence and legal drafting, are required in all legal problems. Perhaps the most fundamental legal skill consists of determining what kind of legal problems a situation may involve, a skill that necessarily transcends any particular specialized knowledge. A lawyer can provide adequate representation in a wholly novel field through necessary study. Competent representation can also be provided through the association of a lawyer of established competence in the field in question.

[3] In an emergency a lawyer may give advice or assistance in a matter in which the lawyer does not have the skill ordinarily required where referral to or consultation or association with another lawyer would be impractical. Even in an emergency, however, assistance should be limited to that reasonably necessary in the circumstances, for ill-considered action under emergency conditions can jeopardize the client's interest.

[4] A lawyer may accept representation where the requisite level of competence can be achieved by reasonable preparation. This applies as well to a lawyer who is appointed as counsel for an unrepresented person. See also Rule 6.2.

Thoroughness and Preparation

[5] Competent handling of a particular matter includes inquiry into and analysis of the factual and legal elements of the problem, and use of methods and procedures meeting the standards of competent practitioners. It also includes adequate preparation. The required attention and preparation are determined in part by what is at stake; major litigation and complex transactions ordinarily require more extensive treatment than matters of lesser complexity and consequence. An agreement between the lawyer and the client regarding the scope of the representation may limit the matters for which the lawyer is responsible. See Rule 1.2(c).

Retaining or Contracting With Other Lawyers

[6] Before a lawyer retains or contracts with other lawyers outside the lawyer's own firm to provide or assist in the provision of legal services to a client, the lawyer should ordinarily obtain informed consent from the client and must reasonably believe that the other lawyers' services will contribute to the competent and ethical representation of the client. See also Rules 1.2 (allocation of authority), 1.4 (communication with client), 1.5(e) (fee sharing), 1.6 (confidentiality), and 5.5(a) (unauthorized practice of law). The reasonableness of the decision to retain or contract with other lawyers outside the lawyer's own firm will depend upon the circumstances, including the education, experience and reputation of the nonfirm lawyers; the nature of the services assigned to the nonfirm lawyers; and the legal protections, professional conduct rules, and ethical environments of the jurisdictions in which the services will be performed, particularly relating to confidential information.

[7] When lawyers from more than one law firm are providing legal services to the client on a particular matter, the lawyers ordinarily should consult with each other and the client about the scope of their respective representations and the allocation of responsibility among them. See Rule 1.2. When making allocations of responsibility in a matter pending before a tribunal, lawyers and parties may have additional obligations that are a matter of law beyond the scope of these Rules.

Maintaining Competence

[8] To maintain the requisite knowledge and skill, a lawyer should keep abreast of changes in the law and its practice, including the benefits and risks associated with relevant technology, engage in continuing study and education and comply with all continuing legal education requirements to which the lawyer is subject.

Rule 1.3: Diligence

A lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client.

Comment

[1] A lawyer should pursue a matter on behalf of a client despite opposition, obstruction or personal inconvenience to the lawyer, and take whatever lawful and ethical measures are required to vindicate a client's cause or endeavor. A lawyer must also act with commitment and dedication to the interests of the client and with zeal in advocacy upon the client's behalf. A lawyer is not bound, however, to press for every advantage that might be realized for a client. For example, a lawyer may have authority to exercise professional discretion in determining the means by which a matter should be pursued. See Rule 1.2. The lawyer's duty to act with reasonable diligence does not require the use of offensive tactics or preclude the treating of all persons involved in the legal process with courtesy and respect.

[2] A lawyer's work load must be controlled so that each matter can be handled competently.

[3] Perhaps no professional shortcoming is more widely resented than procrastination. A client's interests often can be adversely affected by the passage of time or the change of conditions; in extreme instances, as when a lawyer overlooks a statute of limitations, the client's legal position may be destroyed. Even when the client's interests are not affected in substance, however, unreasonable delay can cause a client needless anxiety and undermine confidence in the lawyer's trustworthiness. A lawyer's duty to act with reasonable promptness, however, does not preclude the lawyer from agreeing to a reasonable request for a postponement that will not prejudice the lawyer's client.

[4] Unless the relationship is terminated as provided in Rule 1.16, a lawyer should carry through to conclusion all matters undertaken for a client. If a lawyer's employment is limited to a specific matter, the relationship terminates when the matter has been resolved. If a lawyer has served a client over a substantial period in a variety of matters, the client sometimes may assume that the lawyer will continue to serve on a continuing basis unless the lawyer gives notice of withdrawal. Doubt about whether a client-lawyer relationship still exists should be clarified by the lawyer, preferably in writing, so that the client will not mistakenly suppose the lawyer is looking after the client's affairs when the lawyer has ceased to do so. For example, if a lawyer has handled a judicial or administrative proceeding that produced a result adverse to the client and the lawyer and the client have not agreed that the lawyer will handle the matter on appeal, the lawyer must consult with the client about the possibility of appeal before relinquishing responsibility for the matter. See Rule 1.4(a)(2). Whether the lawyer is obligated to prosecute the appeal for the client depends on the scope of the representation the lawyer has agreed to provide to the client. See Rule 1.2.

[5] To prevent neglect of client matters in the event of a sole practitioner's death or disability, the duty of diligence may require that each sole practitioner prepare a plan, in conformity with applicable rules, that designates another competent lawyer to review client files, notify each client of the lawyer's death or disability, and determine whether there is a need for immediate

protective action. Cf. Rule 28 of the American Bar Association Model Rules for Lawyer Disciplinary Enforcement (providing for court appointment of a lawyer to inventory files and take other protective action in absence of a plan providing for another lawyer to protect the interests of the clients of a deceased or disabled lawyer).

Rule 1.4: Communications

(a) A lawyer shall:

(1) promptly inform the client of any decision or circumstance with respect to which the client's informed consent, as defined in Rule 1.0(e), is required by these Rules;

(2) reasonably consult with the client about the means by which the client's objectives are to be accomplished;

(3) keep the client reasonably informed about the status of the matter;

(4) promptly comply with reasonable requests for information; and

(5) consult with the client about any relevant limitation on the lawyer's conduct when the lawyer knows that the client expects assistance not permitted by the Rules of Professional Conduct or other law.

(b) A lawyer shall explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit the client to make informed decisions regarding the representation.

Comment

[1] Reasonable communication between the lawyer and the client is necessary for the client effectively to participate in the representation.

Communicating with Client

[2] If these Rules require that a particular decision about the representation be made by the client, paragraph (a)(1) requires that the lawyer promptly consult with and secure the client's consent prior to taking action unless prior discussions with the client have resolved what action the client wants the lawyer to take. For example, a lawyer who receives from opposing counsel an offer of settlement in a civil controversy or a proffered plea bargain in a criminal case must promptly inform the client of its substance unless the client has previously indicated that the proposal will be acceptable or unacceptable or has authorized the lawyer to accept or to reject the offer. See Rule 1.2(a).

[3] Paragraph (a)(2) requires the lawyer to reasonably consult with the client about the means to be used to accomplish the client's objectives. In some situations — depending on both the importance of the action under consideration and the feasibility of consulting with the client — this duty will require consultation prior to taking action. In other circumstances, such as during a trial when an immediate decision must be made, the exigency of the situation may require the lawyer to act without prior consultation. In such cases the lawyer must nonetheless act reasonably to inform the client of actions the lawyer has taken on the client's behalf. Additionally, paragraph (a)(3) requires that the lawyer keep the client reasonably informed about the status of the matter, such as significant developments affecting the timing or the substance of the representation.

[4] A lawyer's regular communication with clients will minimize the occasions on which a client will need to request information concerning the representation. When a client makes a reasonable request for information, however, paragraph (a)(4) requires prompt compliance with the request, or if a prompt response is not feasible, that the lawyer, or a member of the lawyer's staff, acknowledge receipt of the request and advise the client when a response may be expected. A lawyer should promptly respond to or acknowledge client communications.

Explaining Matters

[5] The client should have sufficient information to participate intelligently in decisions concerning the objectives of the representation and the means by which they are to be pursued, to the extent the client is willing and able to do so. Adequacy of communication depends in part on the kind of advice or assistance that is involved. For example, when there is time to explain a proposal made in a negotiation, the lawyer should review all important provisions with the client before proceeding to an agreement. In litigation a lawyer should explain the general strategy and prospects of success and ordinarily should consult the client on tactics that are likely to result in significant expense or to injure or coerce others. On the other hand, a lawyer ordinarily will not be expected to describe trial or negotiation strategy in detail. The guiding principle is that the lawyer should fulfill reasonable client expectations for information consistent with the duty to act in the client's best interests, and the client's overall requirements as to the character of representation. In certain circumstances, such as when a lawyer asks a client to consent to a representation affected by a conflict of interest, the client must give informed consent, as defined in Rule 1.0(e).

[6] Ordinarily, the information to be provided is that appropriate for a client who is a comprehending and responsible adult. However, fully informing the client according to this standard may be impracticable, for example, where the client is a child or suffers from diminished capacity. See Rule 1.14. When the client is an organization or group, it is often impossible or inappropriate to inform every one of its members about its legal affairs; ordinarily, the lawyer should address communications to the appropriate officials of the organization. See Rule 1.13. Where many routine matters are involved, a system of limited or occasional reporting may be arranged with the client.

Withholding Information

[7] In some circumstances, a lawyer may be justified in delaying transmission of information when the client would be likely to react imprudently to an immediate communication. Thus, a lawyer might withhold a psychiatric diagnosis of a client when the examining psychiatrist indicates that disclosure would harm the client. A lawyer may not withhold information to serve the lawyer's own interest or convenience or the interests or convenience of another person. Rules or court orders governing litigation may provide that information supplied to a lawyer may not be disclosed to the client. Rule 3.4(c) directs compliance with such rules or orders.

The Legal Burnout Solution: How Secondary Trauma Impacts the Mental Health of Legal Professionals

By Rebecca Howlett and Cynthia Sharp

Perhaps those seeking a law degree should be provided with the warning, “Practicing law can be hazardous to your health!” before signing on the dotted line. In last month’s column (“Addressing Mental Health Issues in the Profession”), we explored how professional stressors and personal challenges can contribute to a decline in personal well-being. This month, we go a step further and discuss the adverse impact that secondary trauma can have on mental health.

Secondary Trauma as an Occupational Hazard

When attorney Russ Stewart accepted a position in the prosecutor’s office, his focus was on serving the public and seeking justice for victims. Never did he consider how the work would affect his emotional well-being. After two years on the job, he found out the hard way. Almost every day, he was exposed to horrific stories of violence and murder through direct interaction with victims or their families. This constant exposure to violent trauma continued indirectly as he reviewed police and hospital records, as well as photographs of macabre crime scenes.

After a particularly intense trial involving the murder of a child, Russ felt like he was falling apart at the seams. Even when able to sleep, he was plagued by troubling dreams and often woke up agonizing over various cases.

His wife, Carrie, noticed that he was drinking too much and overeating and that he frequently “snapped” at her and the kids over petty incidents. She began to suspect that he might be suffering from “secondary trauma,” which she had learned about at a recent work seminar. Also referred to as vicarious trauma, indirect trauma, or compassion fatigue, secondary trauma strikes service professionals such as nurses, first responders, and even lawyers who are indirectly exposed to the trauma of another.

Carrie persuaded Russ to seek help. Over time, he was able to recover and develop coping mechanisms. Most are not so fortunate and become the “walking wounded,” suffering in silence. They are either unaware that they have a treatable problem or perhaps avoid seeking treatment out of fear of being stigmatized. In writing this article, our mission is to raise awareness about secondary trauma and to spread the message that resources are available.

Secondary Trauma in the Legal Field

Studies consistently confirm that legal practitioners are at exceptionally high risk of experiencing distress symptoms associated with secondary trauma. A concurrent study of attorneys, mental health providers, and social workers found that lawyers experienced the most frequent and severe symptoms of secondary trauma and burnout. Overall, the attorneys had diminished pleasure and interest in activities, as well as irritability and difficulties with sleep and concentration. Another study found that attorneys demonstrate significantly higher levels of PTSD, depression,

secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and functional impairment compared with their administrative support staff. Lawyers are at higher risk given longer work hours, high client loads, and more direct contact with traumatized clients. An additional study showed that judges are also at increased risk of secondary trauma and burnout, especially those in criminal or family court.

During the trial process, judges and attorneys may be exposed to highly charged, emotional situations, as well as gruesome and disturbing evidence, which can lead to vicarious traumatization associated with changes in self-identity, spirituality, and one's sense of safety and trust. The implications of the data are evident—unchecked secondary trauma can have far-reaching negative impacts on legal professionals, our clients, and society at large.

Coping with Secondary Trauma

It is essential that we and all participants in the legal process take meaningful action to protect ourselves—and by extension, our clients, victims of crime, and their families—from the potentially harmful effects of secondary trauma.

We've identified a few action steps that will help you effectively manage and avoid the ill effects of vicarious trauma:

1. **Take a non-judgmental look at yourself.** The first step to solving a problem is awareness and acceptance that there is a problem. Taking a self-assessment can be a key starting point to help you gauge whether you may be at risk or currently experiencing the adverse effects of vicarious trauma. For more, see the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale.
2. **Arm yourself with knowledge.** Deepen your understanding of the risk factors and negative effects of compassion fatigue and burnout, as well as ways to implement a trauma-informed legal practice. Seek out additional information on secondary trauma, especially attorney-specific resources and training.
3. **Prioritize your health and well-being.** Put your oxygen mask on first. We are living in a culture where taking time for ourselves may be perceived as selfish, a luxury, or even lazy—don't fall into this trap. Prioritize *you* and practice extreme self-care. Build in guilt-free time to relax and recharge in the short and long-term—take scheduled walks during the workday, take mental health days when you need them, and plan vacations! You can't pour from an empty cup.
4. **Seek help and support.** Remember, you are never alone. If you think you may be at risk or struggling with the effects of secondary trauma, please get the support you need and deserve. As a helpful starting point, the ABA provides a Directory of Lawyer Assistance Programs for each jurisdiction.
5. **Build awareness through mindfulness.** Developing our awareness via mindfulness meditation is a key step we can take not only to help us effectively manage our stressors but also to *prevent* the cognitive dysfunction associated with vicarious trauma. The neuroprotective

effects of mindfulness are cumulative, so the more we practice, the easier it will become to train our bodies and minds to be in a state of relaxation, calm, and focus. Check out our many mindfulness

resources for attorneys at legalburnout.com, including this short breathing exercise to instantly boost mental clarity and reduce stress.

Over the past few years, bar associations and law firms have begun to provide resources in the mental health arena. The availability of these resources, however, will benefit you and others only if you take advantage of them and reach out for support.

What is the next step that you will take toward your best life or to help someone else realize theirs?

Rebecca Howlett, Esq., and Cynthia Sharp, Esq., are co-founders of The Legal Burnout Solution (legalburnout.com), a community dedicated to the well-being of lawyers.

The Legal Burnout Solution: Strategies for a Trauma-Informed Law Practice

By Rebecca Howlett and Cynthia Sharp

All too often, our law school experience doesn't emphasize the "soft skills" necessary to be a successful attorney. We cannot downplay the importance of the human element of practicing law, including mindful communication, empathy, and connection. Indeed, lawyers are often serving clients at times that may be some of the darkest of our clients' lives due to traumatic events.

Working with Traumatized Clients

As the son of Mexican immigrants, attorney Jesús Güereca chose to dedicate his legal career to serving others, especially immigrants and refugees. Jesús has been an immigration attorney for six years and currently works for the only full-service immigration legal aid clinic serving low-income immigrants and refugees in the southwestern United States.

Although personally familiar with what it's like to immigrate to the United States in search of a better life, Jesús was ill-prepared for the heavy toll of immigration law in practice. Recently, Jesús took to social media to share his experience working with Afghan immigrants:

Things I wasn't taught in law school:

1. How to explain to a sheep herder who has never been outside of their province why the United States government evacuated them from Afghanistan, put them in a tent camp, in the middle of the night took them from the camp, put them in jail in solitary confinement, and then started a process to send them back to Afghanistan.
2. How to figure out where Mecca is in relation to El Paso while inside a jail with no windows.
3. How to explain to my client that the government can do this without giving an explanation to anyone.

Jesús's story is all too common as attorneys frequently express to us that they were not adequately prepared for the real-world implications of representing traumatized clients. Jesús

shared that working on behalf of refugees has been dispiriting, yet is a typical experience for those in this part of the profession. “The border is brutal and deadly. If you’re not close to the border, it’s difficult to understand the effects on fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and children.” Indeed, the negative implications of secondary trauma in the legal profession are evident, and it is past time that we acknowledge these effects and implement strategies to protect ourselves and our clients.

Trauma as a Pervasive Issue

Trauma can spring from accidents, natural disasters, medical interventions, childhood abuse and neglect, witnessing or experiencing acts of violence such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, as well as war. [According to the National Council for Behavioral Health](#), 70 percent of adults in the United States have experienced trauma at least once during the course of their lives. Not only is trauma widespread, but it affects people of all ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses. In addition, marginalized community members may be victims of cultural, intergenerational, and historical trauma. Living through the experience of the pandemic has been traumatic for most of us.

It follows that many attorneys have represented victims of trauma throughout the years without even realizing it. It is important to keep in mind that clients may have been traumatized by events completely unrelated to the legal matter at hand. Yet, the impact of the trauma lives on and can ultimately affect the most fundamental aspects of the attorney-client relationship, especially communication.

Building Relationships Through Trauma-Informed Lawyering

Establishing a trauma-informed law practice helps ensure that our actions as legal representatives don’t cause inadvertent stress and re-traumatization of our clients. While focusing on the legal aspect of a matter, the attorney must simultaneously consider the clients’ emotional background and stay closely attuned to their current frame of mind. This will allow the attorney to shift the interaction in accordance with clients’ needs.

Providing trauma-informed legal services is a “win-win” for both attorneys and our clients. It is likely that clients of trauma-informed law firms will be more forthcoming with their attorneys

because of the atmosphere of trust that can be created by implementing the tips outlined in this article. This open communication will allow attorneys to have a more complete account of the facts, which can result in better case outcomes. Besides, clients who feel comfortable with their legal team are more likely to make referrals in the future.

Attorneys who deepen their understanding of trauma are also in a better position to identify and handle the effects of trauma should they present themselves in their law practice. For example, an attorney who represents abused children will probably not be surprised if a young client acts out in some manner during a scheduled meeting. Creating a law practice that promotes the health of both attorneys and our clients takes diligence, but the payoff of better well-being for all is well worth the effort.

Trauma-Informed Practice Tips: A Two-Fold Approach

Trauma—whether experienced directly in your personal life or vicariously through your interactions with clients and others—can have far-reaching, negative consequences for all participants in the legal process. For example, [childhood trauma increases our risk](#) of chronic disease as an adult, being violent or a victim of violence, as well as mental health concerns such as depression and suicide. Establishing a trauma-informed law practice is a two-fold process: (1) taking steps that help prevent re-traumatization of our clients, and (2) taking steps that protect lawyers' health and well-being from exposure to trauma.

1. Client-Focused Practice Tips

Implementing trauma-informed strategies into your law practice costs little to no money yet can help reduce re-traumatization of crime victims and trauma survivors. Use the following simple steps to help alleviate a client's stress and anxiety as well as build trust and improve the attorney-client relationship.

Be open and transparent with your client about the legal process, your role, others' roles in the process, and what can happen during the representation. Start out by explaining in depth the nature of a meeting or interview and be open about what you are doing, such as taking notes. For example, explain why you are taking notes and ask for your client's permission beforehand; afterward, summarize your notes and ask if your client has any questions.

Check in with your clients often and give them opportunities to voice any needs or concerns. Verbally validate any feelings that they express to you. Feeling listened to and understood literally changes our physiology; conversely, so does being met with silence, incomprehension, or rejection when we acknowledge our traumas. Knowing that their feelings matter helps ensure that clients aren't unduly retraumatized when they share their stories and trauma histories.

Be responsive to your client's stated needs, but understand that even if clients feel anxious or uncomfortable, they may not voice these concerns aloud. Be aware and tune into your clients' body language, tone, and general demeanor. Does this person seem closed off, uneasy, agitated, or frustrated? Openly acknowledge any perceived discomfort and ask clients if there is anything you can do to make them feel more comfortable and safe.

Make adjustments to the environment that help your clients feel more secure and at ease. For example, offer accommodating options, such as providing flexible seating arrangements and leaving doors opened or closed. Offer clients periodic breaks during meetings or interviews and let them know that it's okay to ask for a break at any time if they need it.

Overall, understand that trauma affects everyone differently and treat every client as a unique individual. Also bear in mind that many clients' prior experiences with the legal system may have been traumatic. Try not to take it personally if a client directs negativity at you. If clients are willing to participate, link them to trauma-focused therapy that can help them develop strategies for coping with stress and regulating emotions. Above all, be gentle and compassionate toward your client and yourself. We are all doing the best with what we have.

2. Attorney-Focused Practice Tips

To safeguard our health and well-being, it is imperative that legal professionals employ self-care to counterbalance the harmful effects of secondary trauma. The [Trauma-Informed Legal Advocacy Project](#) recommends the following best practices to help mitigate the harmful effects of vicarious trauma on practitioners:

- Create organizational change by promoting discussion and acknowledgment of compassion fatigue in the workplace;

- Encourage employees to take breaks from work as needed; and
- Use contemplative practices to reflect regularly, especially after big wins or losses (e.g., journaling, talk therapy, etc.).

Given the inherent risks of [secondary trauma in the legal field](#), we strongly recommend further educating yourself on the impacts of unresolved trauma. If and when you are ready to examine your personal experiences with trauma, a good starting point is the [ACE \(Adverse Childhood Experiences\) test](#), which is a ten-question quiz that can help you identify your individual risk factors based on your trauma history.

Not surprisingly, successfully implementing a trauma-informed practice requires taking care of yourself! Make a commitment today to prioritize your holistic health and well-being. Be sure to check in at [legalburnout.com](#) as we continue to update our trauma and wellness resources for lawyers in the coming months.

Closing Thoughts

By incorporating the above strategies into your practice toolbox, you can become a more effective advocate and advisor for those who have suffered trauma—including yourself. Besides being the right thing to do, taking these steps may even demonstrate to individuals and the community at large that lawyers actually do have hearts! We would all be better served to remember that we are each of us human beings dealing with untold stresses and challenges. Bottom line: Being compassionate toward our clients and ourselves lends to a healthier, happier state of play for us all.

In next month's column, we will address implicit age bias in the legal arena.

Rebecca Howlett, Esq., and Cynthia Sharp, Esq., are co-founders of [The Legal Burnout Solution \(legalburnout.com\)](#), a community dedicated to the well-being of lawyers. Originally published in ABA GPSolo eReport, Oct. 2021 Issue (Vol. 10, No. 15) by the American Bar Association. Reproduced with permission. All rights reserved.

How Childhood Trauma Impacts Lawyers and Their Clients

By Rebecca Howlett and Cynthia Sharp

Trauma creates change you don't choose. Healing is about creating change you do choose.—Michelle Rosenthal

Over the past 15 months, we have had the privilege of sharing our message with readers of GPSolo eReport and have greatly valued your feedback. By and large, our most popular articles have focused on trauma. Indeed, although recent efforts to promote attorney well-being have included acknowledgment of secondary trauma and strategies to implement a trauma-informed law practice, we have noticed that these initiatives have largely failed to include a critical piece of the puzzle—unresolved primary trauma. As we continue our exploration of ways to curb the negative effects of trauma within the profession, we turn now to the concept of adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs.

Addressing childhood trauma is an intrinsic aspect of promoting attorney well-being as ACEs actually underscore many adult mental and physical illnesses. ACEs can also hinder our ability to effectively manage and cope with stress, which can have dire impacts on our professional responsibilities and overall well-being. Our objective is to raise awareness about ACEs and to provide lawyers with yet another tool to help prioritize their health and well-being. Further, by gaining insight into ACEs, legal professionals will be better equipped to serve clients at a deeper level.

What Are ACEs?

Adverse childhood experiences are potentially traumatic events in early life that, if left unchecked, can lead to long-term negative consequences for our health, relationships, and career. Although you may be hearing about ACEs for the first time, the scientific community has been studying this concept for decades. (See this TED talk by Nadine Burke Harris.) The foundations of ACEs research began after a physician noticed a

pattern of trauma history among many of his weight-loss patients. The scientific question became: Was there a connection between childhood trauma and this health concern in adulthood? The answer was an unequivocal yes.

In the 1990s, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) partnered with Kaiser Permanente to conduct a large-scale study of childhood trauma and its impacts on health and well-being. The study found that trauma is pervasive and exists across all demographics. The CDC defines ACEs in the following basic categories:

- Abuse: physical, emotional, and sexual.
- Neglect: physical and emotional.
- Household challenges: severe unmanaged mental illness, incarcerated relative, mother treated violently, substance abuse, and divorce.

This original study found that almost two in three people in the United States have experienced at least one ACE, and one in four have experienced three or more. Indeed, the more ACEs that we accumulate, the more our risk increases for myriad negative health outcomes, including diabetes, cancer, and even premature death.

Subsequent ACEs research has consistently shown a link between childhood trauma and negative outcomes in adulthood, including substance abuse, mental illness, risk-taking behavior, and even lost earning potential. The evidence is resounding—much of the illness and dysfunction affecting adults is the result of unresolved traumas from our early lives.

Why Should ACEs Matter to Lawyers?

Ultimately, ACEs are deleterious to our overall health and well-being because they cause toxic stress that can negatively alter brain development and even our DNA. While temporary, positive stressors are healthy, ACEs contribute to toxic stress over the long term, which can wreak havoc on our cognitive functioning, including shortened attention span, increased impulsivity, and negative impacts on our ability to learn and make decisions.

Those who grew up with toxic stress may struggle with emotional regulation and find it difficult to form stable relationships and communicate effectively. Critically, if toxic stress goes unmanaged, its negative effects can actually be passed down to our children, a phenomenon known as intergenerational trauma. This means that ACEs can put future generations at risk of negative health and social outcomes even if they have never experienced trauma directly themselves.

By understanding and managing our own traumas, we will be better able to advocate for our clients and ourselves. Given the prevalence of ACEs in the general population, many attorneys will experience long-term negative health outcomes if their own childhood traumas go unacknowledged and, thus, unresolved. ACEs can make us more sensitive to stress overall, including intensified reactions to relatively minor stressors, let alone the high-stress environment of practicing law. In addition, lawyers will inevitably encounter clients who are experiencing unresolved trauma and who can benefit from trauma-informed law practices. The following simple steps are designed to help attorneys facing their own childhood trauma or provide trauma-informed support to clients:

Attorney-Focused Suggestions

Assess yourself. A good starting point is to determine your own ACEs score by taking the ten-question ACEs Test. Higher scores indicate increased risk for poor adult health outcomes, especially if you have four or more ACEs. According to the Stop Abuse Campaign, however, as compared with those who score zero, adults with an ACE score of one are twice as likely to be alcoholics and the chance of alcoholism quadruples for those who score two out of ten.

Seek professional support. Those ready to face past trauma may very well be uncomfortable with the feelings that accompany painful memories. Some may even dismiss the past trauma as insignificant and try to remain in that great comfort zone of denial. However, your co-authors can assure you that the journey is worthwhile as the

reward can be newfound resilience in all aspects of life. Becky will personally attest that getting into therapy is the single best decision she ever made, and she maintains this therapeutic relationship to this day.

Engage in extreme self-care. Take charge of your life today and commit to building a healthy lifestyle. Creating a strong foundation both physically and mentally will position you to withstand future stresses and challenges. Besides, don't you owe it to yourself to live your best life? What's holding you back? Specific self-care tips are outlined in our article "Health and Well-Being for Lawyers - The Time is Now."

Client-Focused Suggestions

Screen for individual and family mental health concerns. We can dispense sounder advice and provide stronger advocacy if we have been presented with complete and accurate details of a client's situation. In some areas of law, this can include information about mental health concerns faced by the client or their family members. In particular, attorneys practicing either family or criminal law need to understand how these issues can affect the outcome of each and every case. Kevin Chroman, author of "Making the Case for ACEs: How the Legal System Can Further Help Children and Take Meaningful Steps to Address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)" (LACBA, vol. 18, no. 3, Fall 2020), suggests administering a screening at the inception of each matter in order to gain deeper insight that will improve the quality of our service.

Provide referrals and resources to your client. Screening results will put you in the best position to make the appropriate referral to a qualified mental health professional or perhaps to a social worker who has access to an array of social services. For example, a family law attorney may suggest that clients seek counseling services for their children because divorce or separation is classified as an ACE. Overall, ACEs are preventable, and early intervention and treatment may very well save a child years of unnecessary misery. As you continue to educate yourself on the topic of ACEs, be sure to share newly discovered information with your clientele.

For more ways to implement trauma-informed legal services, see our article, “Strategies for a Trauma-Informed Law Practice.”

Moving Forward

Lawyers who are aware of and have a basic understanding of ACEs will be in a unique position to provide more meaningful representation to clients, as well as heal trauma experienced directly in their own lives.

The importance of prioritizing attorney well-being has become more widely touted over the past few years. Indeed, bar associations, law firms, and other legal organizations have made sincere efforts to make resources readily available. As these lawyer wellness initiatives continue to evolve, we hope to see more emphasis placed on building awareness and normalizing conversations about the harmful effects of primary childhood trauma on attorneys’ well-being.

Rebecca Howlett, Esq., and Cynthia Sharp, Esq., are co-founders of The Legal Burnout Solution (legalburnout.com), a community dedicated to the well-being of lawyers.

Endnote

1. The following two “Legal Burnout Solution” columns provide useful background on the problems surrounding trauma in the legal context: “How Secondary Trauma Impacts the Mental Health of Legal Professionals” and “Strategies for a Trauma-Informed Law Practice.”

The Legal Burnout Solution: Creating Healthy Boundaries with Clients

By Rebecca Howlett and Cynthia Sharp

Walls keep everybody out. Boundaries teach them where the door is. —Mark Groves

Creating and enforcing clear and appropriate boundaries with clients is a critical aspect of the attorney-client relationship. Effective boundaries can help an attorney build trust and respect, decrease stress, and improve the quality of representation. Setting and maintaining boundaries can be a challenge, however, especially because we undoubtedly work with clients who have various expectations, needs, or perspectives. In this article, we outline the signs of blurred boundaries, explore the importance of creating and enforcing clear boundaries, and conclude with suggestions on how to effectively establish and maintain them in practice.

Matthew's Story

Although most of us entered the profession because we want to help people, it can be difficult to keep emotions in check. Indeed, some practitioners are at heightened risk of [compassion fatigue and secondary trauma](#), including judges and attorneys in criminal and family court. One of our readers, Matthew—a matrimonial attorney with ten years in practice—shared the following experience. Perhaps some of you have experienced similar dilemmas.

Sally (not her real name) retained Matthew to represent her in a divorce from her abusive husband with whom she had two small children. Matthew felt sorry for her from the outset and was committed to obtaining a favorable result. During the representation, Matthew became deeply emotionally invested in the matter, and his actions contributed to “boundary creep.” For example, he frequently communicated with Sally after normal business hours when the conversation could have easily taken place between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. These after-hours conversations, which often focused on Sally’s emotional struggles, frequently went unbilled because of the personal connection that had been established.

Ultimately, Matthew began opening up to his client about his own abusive childhood and shared extensive details about how it has affected him. After Sally’s estranged husband filed for

bankruptcy, she begged Matthew to represent her interests in the proceedings. Matthew planned to do so even though he had no experience whatsoever in bankruptcy law.

Fortunately, Matthew's law partner was made aware of the situation and gently pointed out that personal and professional boundaries were being crossed. His partner compassionately yet clearly explained why corrective action was necessary to ensure Matthew and his supervising attorney met their respective ethical obligations, safeguarded the integrity of the client's matter, and properly supported Matthew's overall health and well-being and that of his client.

If his partner hadn't stepped in, Matthew could have found himself perpetuating an unhealthy and ethically compromising situation—one in which many lawyers find themselves stuck. Once he processed his partner's perspective, Matthew had a difficult and straightforward conversation with Sally and was able to reestablish a purely professional relationship. The firm also referred Sally to trauma-informed counseling resources for herself and the children.

This experience also helped Matthew see he needed more support to address his own childhood trauma, and he ultimately entered professional therapy. Matthew shared that counseling has indelibly changed how he approaches the practice of law. He reports that therapy has helped him to process his [adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\)](#), as well as empowered him with tools and skills to set appropriate boundaries with clients and others.

Indicators of Weak Attorney-Client Boundaries

In retrospect, Matthew realized that the signs of overstepped boundaries were apparent all along. After lengthy reflection and talking through the situation with his therapist, he realized he had been unaware of the “red flags” at the time and was likely in denial. The following are a few common signs that Matthew will watch out for in the future:

- **Preoccupation with the client.** Matthew is not the first lawyer to become overly invested in clients and their personal problems. After all, we are humans first, and it is natural to feel empathy and compassion. If you find yourself thinking about a client on a frequent basis, perhaps worrying about his or her well-being—or if the client's experiences have brought back painful memories and feelings from your own history—it's most likely time to take a step back and ensure that the relationship is on the

proper course. Perhaps an open dialogue with a trusted colleague would be beneficial. Always keep in mind that an attorney who crosses the professional/personal line may have difficulty remaining objective, which could negatively impact the decision-making process and jeopardize the case.

- **Self-disclosure.** In certain circumstances, attorney self-disclosure of personal information may help strengthen the relationship. For example, one of Cindy's areas of practice was special-needs planning. She often told the parents of children with special needs about her own "special sister" to convey to them that she identified with their situation and could offer unique insight. Oversharing personal information, however, can lead to an unhealthy attorney-client relationship. Matthew now understands that while a mention of his abusive childhood may have deepened his professional bond with Sally, he crossed the line when he began providing details and discussing the emotional impact of the abuse.

- **Inability to say a final "no."** Although Matthew knew the dangers of treading outside his areas of expertise, he allowed Sally to persuade him to represent her interests in bankruptcy court. His lack of experience could have led to an adverse outcome that probably would have damaged his professional relationship with her. Besides, we can only imagine the stress that he would have endured during the representation. Some clients will even ask their lawyer to commit unethical behavior. During Cindy's 30 years of practice, she was asked on more than one occasion to backdate documents. Naturally, she outright refused. Unfortunately, many lawyers succumb to client pressure and find themselves in an ethical bind.

- **Special fiscal arrangements.** Matthew did not routinely take calls after hours and certainly billed for every moment spent on the phone—except with Sally. By not writing down his time, Matthew was cutting her a break on the bill. This behavior on his part can lead to a slippery slope. If the situation had continued, perhaps he would have given her additional discounts on her fees or even allowed invoices to go unpaid.

- **Unrestricted or excessive availability.** By engaging in after-hours contact with Sally, Matthew was affording her special access that was not extended to others. Certainly, there

are circumstances in which attorneys need to have client contact during the evening or weekend. However, client contact during a lawyer's personal time should be limited to emergent or unusual situations.

- **Fantasies about a romantic relationship.** Fortunately, Matthew and Sally did not become romantically involved, although they could have easily headed in that direction. This is good news from an ethical perspective because the relationship could have been in violation of American Bar Association Model Rule of Professional Conduct 1.8(j). Under this rule, "A lawyer shall not have sexual relations with a client unless a consensual sexual relationship existed between them when the client-lawyer relationship commenced." While it seems pretty obvious that sexual relationships with clients are strictly off-limits, each year a number of ethics cases are reported in which an attorney forgot or disregarded this basic rule of thumb.

Why Setting Boundaries Is Essential

Setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries benefits all parties in the attorney-client relationship. Below are a few of the reasons why enforcing healthy boundaries is a key component for successful advocacy and maintaining overall health and well-being:

- **Safeguard mental health.** Direct interaction with traumatized clients, long hours, and high client loads put lawyers at heightened risk of secondary trauma, burnout, and other mental health concerns such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. [Recommended best practices for combatting the ill effects of compassion fatigue](#) include setting boundaries, taking breaks from work, and prioritizing self-care.
- **Maintain professionalism.** Blurring the boundaries of our professional and personal lives can leave lawyers at risk of violating our professional ethics responsibilities. Indeed, adhering to appropriate boundaries with clients helps attorneys protect their professional reputations, avoid conflicts of interest, as well as promote objective decision-making and ongoing respect and trust in the attorney-client relationship.
- **Improve case outcomes.** Maintaining healthy boundaries with our clients helps us advocate to the best of our ability and fosters positive case outcomes. For example,

clearly defining expectations about communication at the onset of the legal representation can benefit our overall productivity and ultimately boost client satisfaction.

How to Set Boundaries with Clients

As service providers, it can be tempting for lawyers to overextend themselves with clients, especially by maintaining communication on evenings and weekends. Practicing with no support staff, solo attorney Nick Zales has found that setting explicit expectations with clients about communication is key to maintaining his well-being and providing the highest level of service.

When Nick receives non-emergency communications from clients on weekends, he responds Monday morning, thanks them for their interest in the case, and lets them know that he does not work on weekends as he needs downtime in order to best serve them. “The key is to show them you are available in an emergency, but not 24/7. It has worked for me 99 percent of the time. Sometimes it takes a second contact. Absent that, I bill them for listening to their messages, and that usually puts a stop to that.”

Below are a few strategies to establish effective boundaries with clients and set yourself up for success in your law practice and your life:

- **Implement a law firm communication policy.** Be sure to clearly define your firm’s communication policy with clients early and often. For example, use the retainer agreement and initial client interview to set forth your firm’s policy for email and phone communications, including expectations for response times. You may also find it helpful to set automatic response emails, which can respectfully remind clients of these policies in real time.
- **Be consistent.** Communication protocols are only effective if we enforce them! After setting expectations with your clients, stick to your defined boundaries. For instance, if your policy is not to answer emails after 7:00 p.m., then don’t do it! Practice discipline and be consistent. Making haphazard exceptions to your communication policy will quickly erode expectations about your boundaries and may leave clients feeling confused and even disgruntled.

- **Keep it professional.** Focus on the clients' legal needs and do not get involved in their personal affairs. Strive to be empathetic and actively listen to your client while still maintaining a professional distance. If clients share personal details beyond the scope of the matter, be respectful and acknowledge their feelings but remain focused on the case at hand. Refer clients to additional services, such as counseling, as appropriate.
- **Practice mindfulness meditation.** Practicing mindfulness meditation can help attorneys reduce stress, increase awareness, and improve mental clarity, all of which support our ability to maintain healthy boundaries with clients. [Experiment with different mindfulness tools and techniques](#) to find what resonates with you personally. Make technology your ally and set alerts on your devices to stretch and take a break. To maintain consistent practice over time, focus on building small mindfulness practices into your daily routine and making them habits. Remember, the positive effects of mindfulness meditation are cumulative, so the more you practice, the more you can reap the rewards.

If you are looking for additional strategies to integrate mindfulness into your everyday life and practice, email us at cindy@legalburnout.com, and we'll forward you a copy of our Mindfulness Resources Guide for Attorneys.

Moving Forward

Communicating and upholding healthy boundaries with a client helps establish a strong foundation for a professional and ethical relationship. Failure to enforce such boundaries can interfere with the attorney's ability to act in the client's best interest and can also jeopardize the lawyer's well-being.

In next month's column, we will offer our perspectives on the benefits, pitfalls, and ethical issues of ChatGPT.

Rebecca Howlett, Esq. and Cynthia Sharp, Esq. are co-founders of [The Legal Burnout Solution \(legalburnout.com\)](#), a community dedicated to the well-being of lawyers.



Veteran attorney Cynthia Sharp (CEO of The Sharper Lawyer) works with motivated lawyers seeking to generate additional revenue for their law firms. She practiced law from 1982 - 2009 and then embarked on a professional speaking and writing career. Ever since, she has served solo and small firm attorneys throughout North America. In the spring of 2020, she co-founded legalburnout.com, dedicated to helping legal professionals succeed by applying mindfulness principles to all areas of their lives.

Cindy, author of [The Lawyer's Guide to Financial Planning](#), published by ABA Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division, is also a Contributor to the Division's books [How to Capture and Keep Clients: Marketing Strategies for Lawyers](#) as well as [Effectively Staffing Your Law Firm](#). As Director of Client Services for [The Legal Burnout Solution](#), Cynthia has helped lead over 3500 attorneys in live meditations.

She has delivered close to 250 live presentations over the past 35 years on behalf of the American Bar Association, 20 state bar associations, Million Dollar Round Table, Professional Services Marketing Association, and numerous legal, financial and professional groups, as well as private seminars for her law firm clients.

Cindy served as Business Development columnist on behalf of the ABA GP Solo eReport, Social Media Strategist for GP Solo and has served as a regular guest contributor to ALM's publication Marketing the Law Firm. In addition, she has written well over 135 articles over the past 40 years that have been published in various journals throughout the country.

During 2017/18, Cindy held positions on the GP Solo and eReport Boards of the ABA Solo, Small Firm & General Practice Division, having previously served as Chair of the Publications Board of the Division and on the Division's Council. She completed her term as President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Speakers Association in June of 2015 and served as Dean of the Speaker Academy the subsequent year. Sharp has also been an active member in the Association of Continuing Legal Education (ACLEA).

Cindy was named Trainer of the Year by the American Bar Association Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division, a national award presented in New York City on May 3, 2019.

Cindy lives in Philadelphia with her husband, Mark H. Gallant and their dog Carlos. She studies Spanish, enjoys the arts and is active in paper crafting, with a focus on card making.



Rebecca Howlett (she/they) is an attorney, consultant, and legal educator. After graduating from KU Law *cum laude* with a Tribal Lawyers Certificate in 2014, Becky focused her career on Indian Country advocacy, developing an expertise in federal Indian law and policy. Becky's experience emphasizes relationship building, interdisciplinary collaboration, and program development, including delivering educational seminars and trainings re: cultural competency, implicit bias, and attorney well-being.

Becky's attorney-wellness advocacy began after struggling with depression, anxiety, and burnout as a law student and practicing attorney. In the spring of 2020, she co-founded legalburnout.com to help legal advocates effectively manage stress, cultivate healthy work environments, and prevent burnout. As Director of Attorney Well-Being, Becky has led live meditations for more than 15,000 attorneys.

Becky received her Contemplative Practice Teacher certification from the Nature Center for Meditation in September 2020 after completing 550 hours of study and training. Becky is formally certified to teach a variety of contemplative practices, including mindfulness meditation, breathwork, and many other evidence-based tools and techniques.

Becky lives in Kansas City where she loves singing, spending time in nature and playing with her two Siamese cats, Phineas and Casper. She identifies as queer and non-binary.

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