



PROGRAM MATERIALS

Program #3664

March 20, 2026

**Lawyer Mental Health and Substance
Use Impairment:
Recognition, Risk Factors, and
Prevention in the Legal Profession**

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Lawyer Mental Health and Substance Use Impairment:

Recognition, Risk Factors, and Prevention In the Legal Profession



Presented by:
Brian S. Quinn, Esquire
Education and Outreach Coordinator
Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of PA, Inc.

What Is A LAP ?

Our mission:

To provide a caring peer assistance program to save the lives and restore the health and professional competence of lawyers and judges, members of their families, and law students who are at risk as a result of alcohol and drug use, gambling, depression or other serious mental illness. We carry out this mission through a combination of confidential helpline services, volunteer support and education.

- Free information and literature
- Free evaluation by a healthcare professional
- Free assistance with interventions
- Peer support
- Lawyer/Judge/Law Student-only support group meetings
- LCL staff support
- **FULLY OPERATIONAL** during COVID-19

Our services are **free, confidential, non-judgmental** and **non-obligatory**.

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania

CONFIDENTIAL Helpline

1-888-999-1941

**24 hrs./day, 7 days/week,
365 days/year**

www.lclpa.org

We Protect Your Identity and Information

LAPs do **not*** report or disclose any identifying information to the Supreme Court, the Judicial Conduct Board, the Disciplinary Board, the Board of Law Examiners or any other agency of the Supreme Court; nor do we report or disclose any identifying information to a State Bar Association, local Bar Associations or any judicial or law related organization. We do not report any identifying information to anyone without your prior consent.

You may remain anonymous and still receive our services.

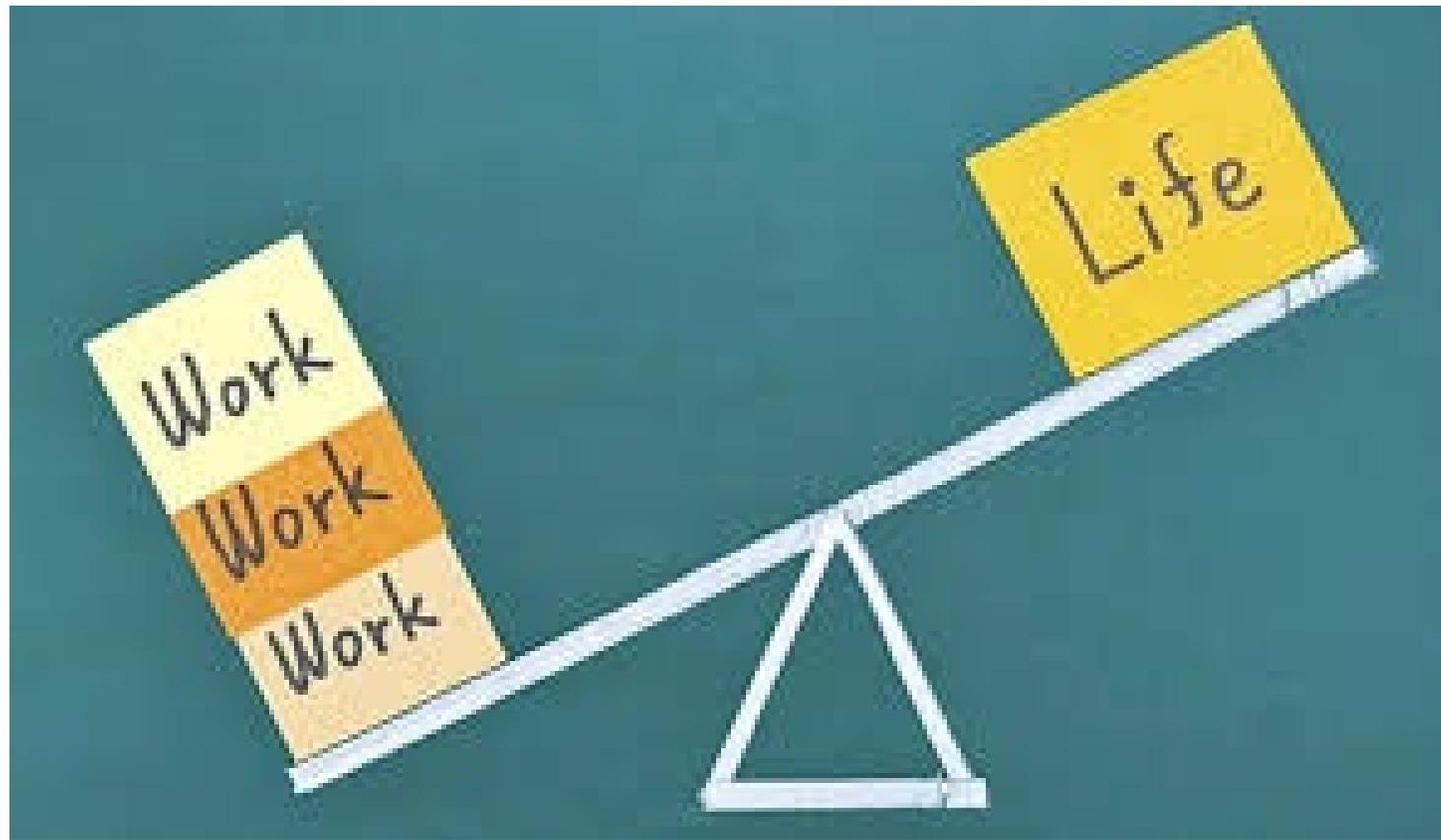
CONSULT YOUR STATE'S RULES !!

GUIDANCE FROM THE COURT

Most* Rules of Professional Conduct address that concern by providing an exception to the duty to report. ABA Model Rule 8.3(c): “The Rule does not require disclosure of information otherwise protected by Rule 1.6 or information gained by a lawyer or judge while participating in an approved lawyers assistance program.”

Comment 7 : “Providing for an exception ... encourages lawyers and judges to seek treatment through such a program. Conversely, without such an exception, lawyers and judges may hesitate to seek assistance from these programs, which may then result in additional harm to their professional careers and additional injury to the welfare of clients and to the public.” (emphasis added)

***CONSULT THE RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT IN YOUR STATE**



THE PROBLEMS



Lawyers were at an increased risk to develop alcohol, substance use and mental health disorders prior to COVID-19 related issues.

ABA / Hazelden- Betty Ford Study

(Published February, 2016 *Journal of Addiction Medicine*)

Problematic Drinking*

- 6.4% of entire U.S. population
- 21% of all licensed attorneys
- 32% of all attorneys under 30 yrs. old

* Problematic drinking defined as hazardous, possible dependence



Be Honest, Be Objective

Nobody is going to know how you answered these.

- Have friends or colleagues expressed concern or otherwise commented about your drinking ?
- Does your drinking make you care less about work responsibilities ?
- Do you ever want to drink the morning after a night of drinking ?
- Do you regularly drink alone ?
- Has drinking led to legal or ethics problems for you ?
- Have you gotten into financial problems because of drinking ?

Be Honest, Be Objective

Nobody is going to know how you answered these.

- Have you found that you need to drink more than you once did in order to get the desired effect, or that your usual number of drinks had much less effect ?
- Do you avoid drinking with people in the legal community so that you feel freer to drink more ?
- Have you ever missed or rescheduled a meeting or court appearance because you were drunk or hung over ?
- Is drinking making your home life unhappy or causing domestic issues ?
- Has your professional ambition decreased since drinking

Be Honest, Be Objective

Nobody is going to know how you answered these.

- Does drinking take priority over exercise or other forms of self care or hobbies that you may enjoy ?
- Do you drink to escape from professional and personal worries ?
- Have you ever had a complete loss of memory (blackout) as a result of your drinking ?
- Has your physician ever expressed concern about your drinking or suggested you cut back ?
- Do you feel uncomfortable if alcohol is not available in social situations ?

—

Answering yes to even one or two of these might be reason enough for you to take a harder look at your drinking and to examine the role it plays in your life. in your life.

Beyond one or two, the more of these you answered affirmatively, the more important it will be to have your drinking further assessed by a professional and to otherwise take protective steps toward reducing your alcohol related risks.





ABA / Hazelden- Betty Ford Study

(Published February, 2016 *Journal of Addiction Medicine*)

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale

- Depression – **28%** of all attorneys
- Stress – **23%** of all attorneys
- Anxiety – **19%** of all attorneys
- Higher rates among younger lawyers

What Causes Depression ?



Depression has many possible causes, including faulty mood regulation by the brain, genetic vulnerability, stressful life events, medications, and medical problems. It's believed that several of these forces interact to bring on depression.

“AM I DEPRESSED ?”

Flat, apathetic, sad,
and/or irritable mood
most days

Decreased pleasure
and/or loss of interest

Feelings of
worthlessness,
excessive/inappropriate
guilt

Feelings of helplessness,
hopelessness

Recurrent thoughts of
death or suicide

Increased use of
substances to cope (i.e.,
alcohol,

marijuana, opiates,
stimulants,
etc.) Insomnia or
hypersomnia

**Social or occupational
distress/isolation**



Aloneness

Solitude vs. Loneliness

Solitude

- The *physical* state of being alone
- Need not be a permanent experience
- Balance between solitude & togetherness
- Develop an “I’m not alone” mentality



Aloneness

Solitude vs. Loneliness

Loneliness

- The *emotional* state of being alone
- Response to perceived isolation
- Belief that no one understands our circumstances, thoughts or emotions
- More importantly, a belief that no one cares

Social Isolation

Social isolation is the combination of solitude and loneliness, experienced by an individual for an extended period. Both the emotional and physical state feed off of one another and can create an inability to reengage with society in a meaningful way.

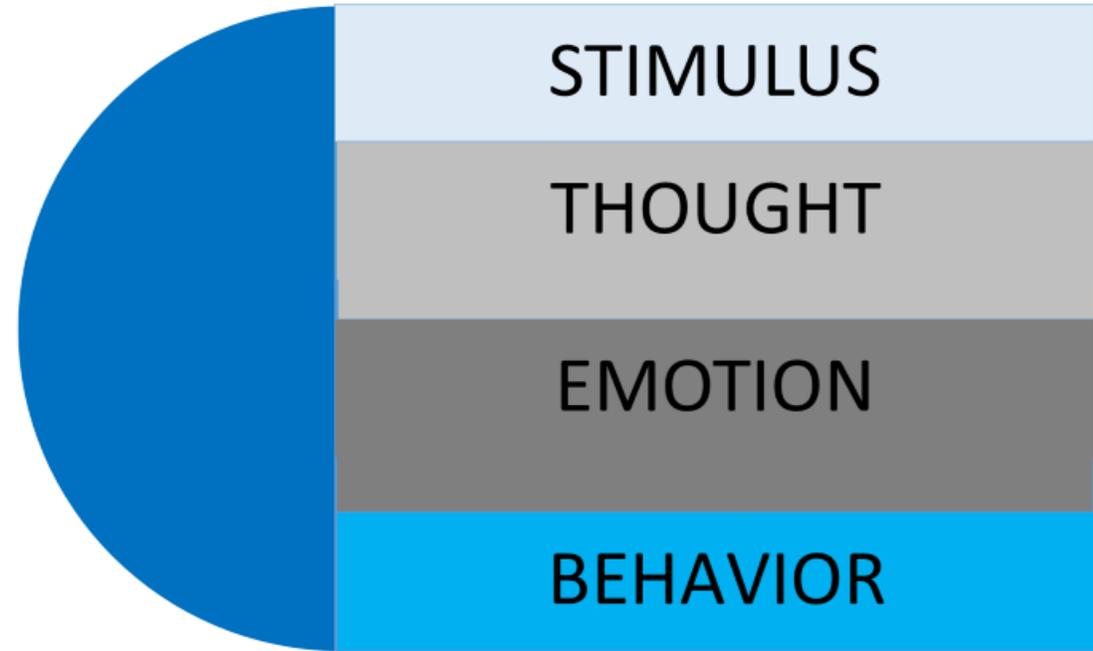


Are You Technolonly ?



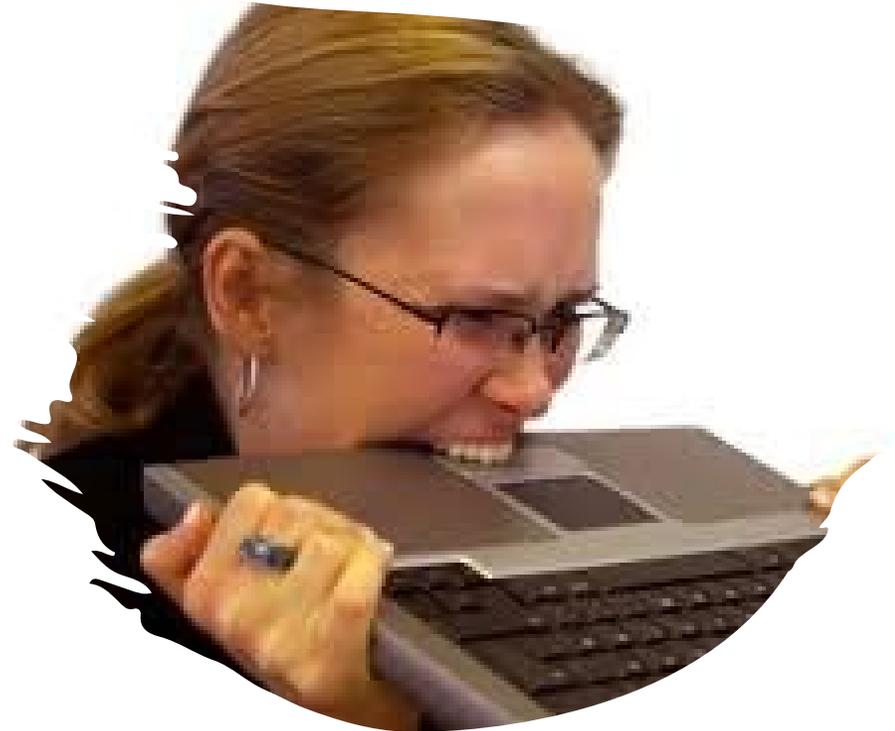
WHAT IS STRESS ?

Psychological stress is composed of the following sequence of elements:



HOW STRESSED ARE YOU ?

- My work requires me to do too much in too little time.
- The people at my law firm or department are cold, unfriendly or rude.
- The physical environment is unpleasant.
- I deal with too many unreasonable and difficult people.



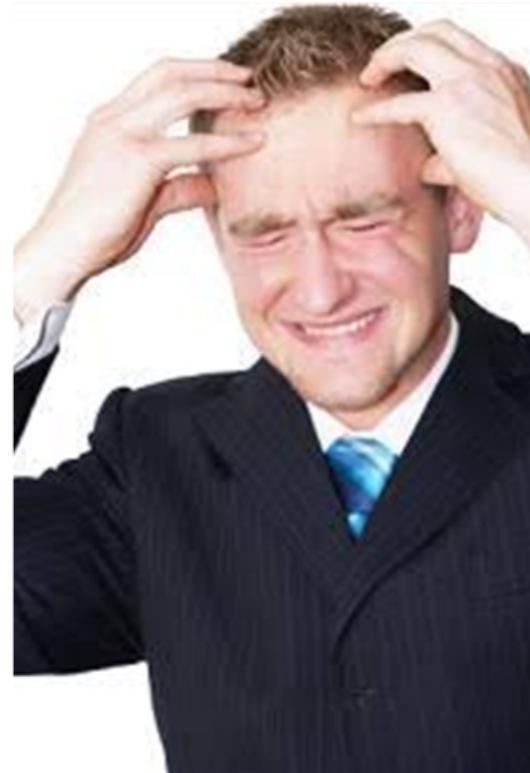
HOW STRESSED ARE YOU ?

- My work bores me.
- Billable hour quotas are a source of stress for me.
- I'm not good at what I do.
- I'm not making a positive contribution to society or to others.
- What I am doing doesn't deserve respect /get enough respect.



HOW STRESSED ARE YOU ?

- I feel overly responsible for everything and everyone.
- I overanalyze things and am too cautious.
- I often feel depressed, defeated or hopeless.
- I often rely on alcohol or drugs to help me feel good.
- I think about quitting at least once a month.
- Occasionally, I think about suicide.



STRESS or DISTRESS ?

- Some stress is healthy. Positive stressors can energize and motivate us to be productive and creative problem solvers.
- A totally stress free life is not only unrealistic, it can actually be a harmful form of denial.
- We need to eliminate distress. Distress is harmful both physically and psychologically.
- Gradual, incremental increases in responsibilities, duties, pressures and demands at home and work combined with long work days and weeks is risky.

**We become unaware that we have lost
balance in our lives !!**

Distress Assessment Quiz

Do any of the following attributes apply to you? Check the ones that apply:

- Do you sleep less than 7-8 hours per night?
- Is your sleep restless or do you wake up a lot?
- Is it difficult to get out of bed in the morning?
- Do you exercise less than 5 hours a week (including walks)?
- Do you eat a lot of fast foods or junk foods?
- Do you skip breakfast or lunch?
- Do you drink more than 2-3 cups of coffee a day?
- Do you drink more than 2-3 alcoholic beverages a day?

Distress Assessment Quiz

Do any of the following attributes apply to you? Check the ones that apply:

- Do you take sedatives or sleep aids with/without a drink to relax or sleep?
- Are you more impatient and irritable than you would like to be?
- Do you feel that you are not in control of your life?
- Are you feeling worn out at the end of most days?
- Do you wish for more time to spend with family or yourself?

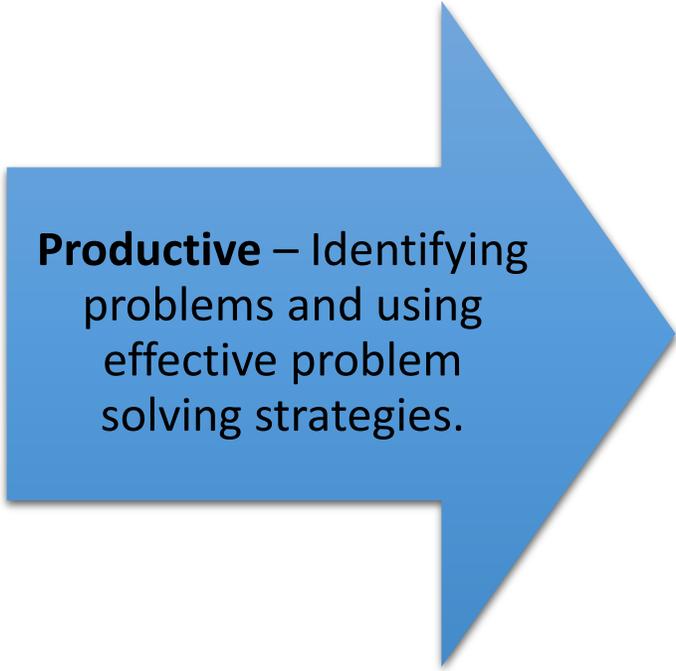
Distress Assessment Quiz

Do any of the following attributes apply to you? Check the ones that apply:

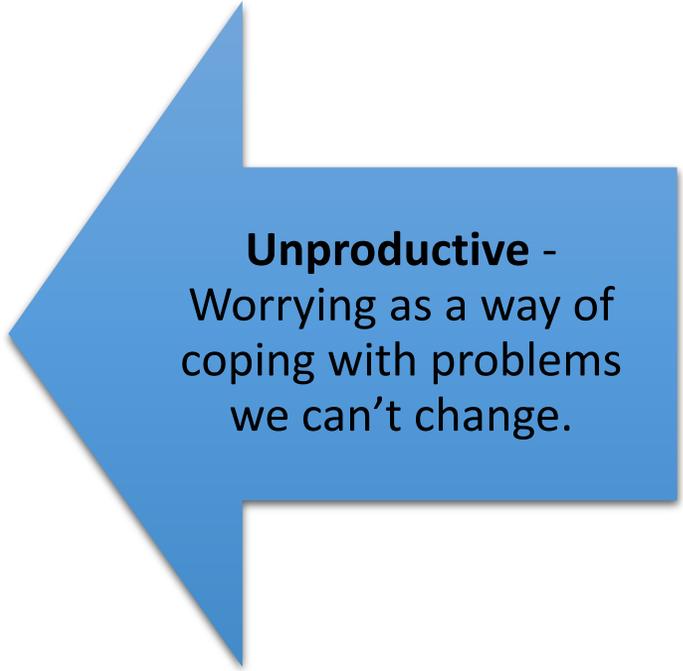
- Are you worried about your marriage, children or parents?
- Are you struggling to make (financial) ends meet?
- Do you work a lot of nights, weekends or holidays?
- Do you skip vacations?
- Do you feel that you don't have anybody to confide in?
- Are you feeling stressed over how many "yes" answers you just gave?

The more marks, the greater the likelihood that you are in distress. Change is possible !!!

Productive worry vs. Unproductive worry



Productive – Identifying problems and using effective problem solving strategies.



Unproductive - Worrying as a way of coping with problems we can't change.

BURNOUT



WHAT IS BURNOUT ?

- ***Fatigue***, no matter how much someone rests or sleeps. An **exhaustion that runs deeper than sleep deprivation.**
- ***Cynicism*** about life or a feeling that **nothing a person does really matters.** Burned out people are generally **disengaged**
- A sense of ***inefficacy***. Burned out people feel like they are **exerting significant effort, but are not making any progress** or gaining any recognition.
- Burnout syndrome is **not a medically recognized condition**, thus there is no clear diagnosis or treatment.

Why are Lawyers Burning Out ?

While most people experience stress in their lives, lawyers and people in the legal profession face a unique conundrum : For many, the drive and dedication that make them successful as a lawyer is also what's causing stress and burning them out !



In other words.....

Our personalities and
Our Profession Put at
High Risk



“What’s Wrong With Him/Her?”

You notice a change from baseline.

- Unreliability
- Change in behavior and reactivity
- Decreased quality or quantity of work product
- Disheveled appearance or looking ‘ill’
- Frequent somatic complaints (headaches, back or stomach pain, etc.)





“What’s Wrong With Him/Her?”

- Missing deadlines and filings
- Absenteeism
- Erratic, irritable and moody
- Withdrawn and uncooperative
- Abrupt weight gain or loss
- Client complaints; trust irregularities

So....what are we going to do ?





Impossible

Set *REALISTIC*
Goals for Yourself

Strategies (that work)



Set Realistic Goals

Focus on things you CAN control

Lawyers already have control issues. As long as we're focusing on questions with unknowable answers and circumstances outside of our personal control, this strategy will get us nowhere other than **drained, anxious and overwhelmed !**





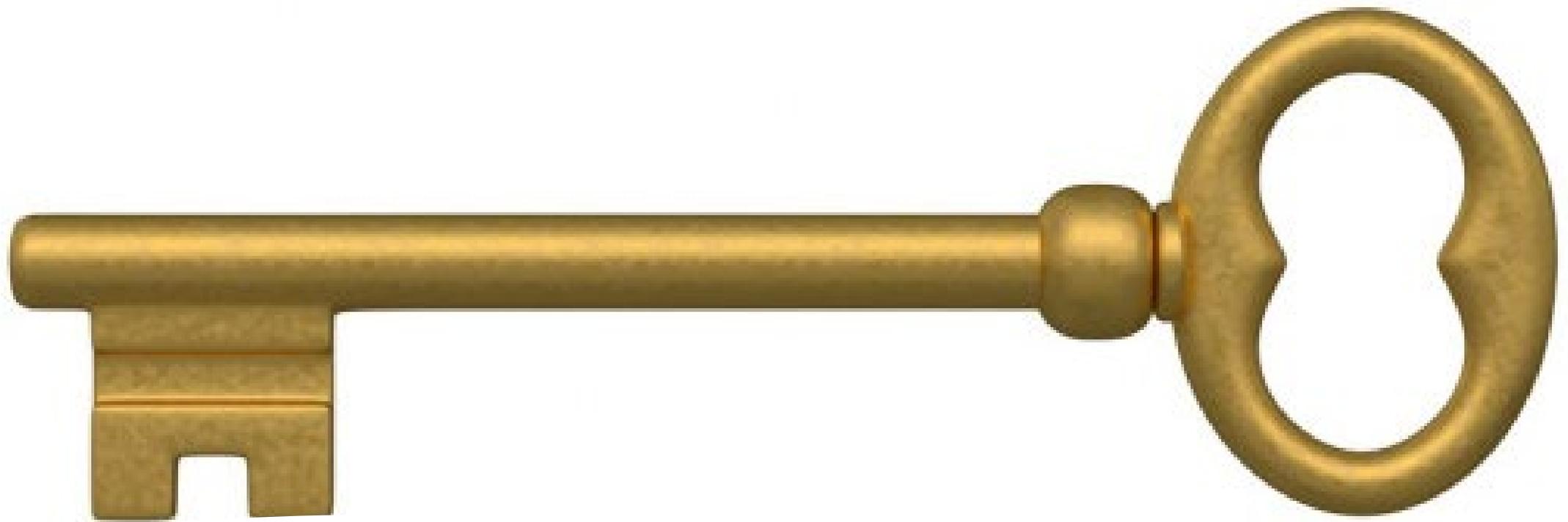
WOOP it up in 2026!!

- **Wish** – identifying a wish or goal you want to achieve
- **Outcome** – mentally imagine one positive outcome and one
- **Obstacle** that stands in the way
- **Plan** for how you can get around that obstacle

Remember.....

*A Goal Without a Plan
Is Just a Wish*

- Antoine De Saint Exupery



“The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule, **but to SCHEDULE your priorities.**”

- *Steven Covey*

Prioritize your day

- Step back and look at your “to-do” list.
- How many are critical and **MUST** be done that day.
- What are you working to achieve ?
- Create a plan that will work toward your objective.
- THEN schedule your priorities
- DON'T have 10 things on your list – focus on 3 or 4 !



USE QUICK STRESS- BUSTERS

Pause – lean back- give your eyes a rest for a couple minutes.

Take three deep breaths and imagine your muscles relaxing from head to toe

Be mindful. Focus on the immediate present. Enjoy the moment.

Maintain a sense of humor about yourself.

Healthy routines are good- don't get trapped in a rut

Prioritize at work and home and manage your time effectively.

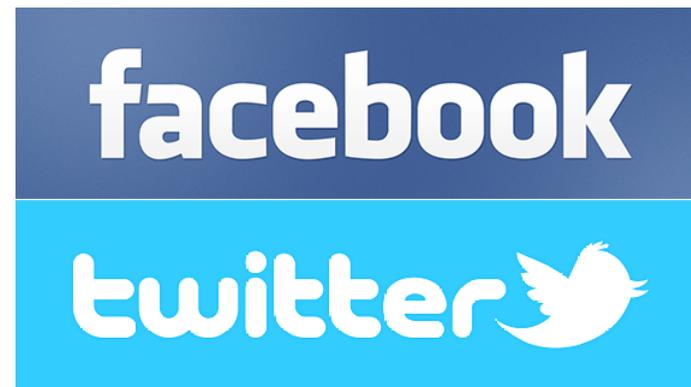
ASK FOR HELP. Talk it out with someone you trust.

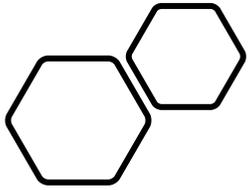


SET BOUNDARIES



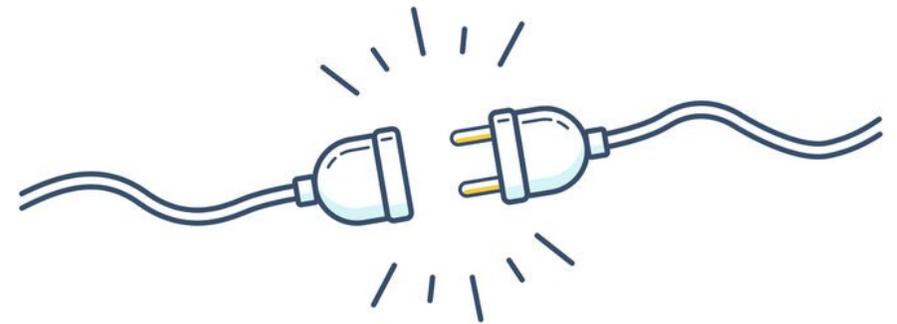
Disconnect





Boundaries: Disconnect

- Turn off notifications.
- Do not charge your phone beside bed.
- Do not keep phone with you during meals, exercise, or social activities.
- Read a book or magazine rather than your phone or tablet.
- Get away from your PC to do some work, take healthy breaks from the screen, and don't take the laptop with you on weekends or vacations.





Boundaries: Set Limits

- Check email x times per day at designated times (and let clients and colleagues know/expect that).
- Limit Social Media to 10 minutes per platform per day, Use a timer (Hunt et. al, 2018).
- Monitor your use (use monitoring apps, check Screen Time on iPhone, etc.).
- Use Do Not Disturb.



MORE QUICK STRESS-BUSTERS

- Meditate and/or pray. CONSISTENT stress reduction occurs with only 10 minutes of daily meditation.
- Unplug from social media when acutely stressed.
- Exercise.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Cultivate a positive attitude.
- Sleep 8 hours/ night when possible.
- Avoid overuse of alcohol or prescription drugs. These short term “fixes” just mask the problem.



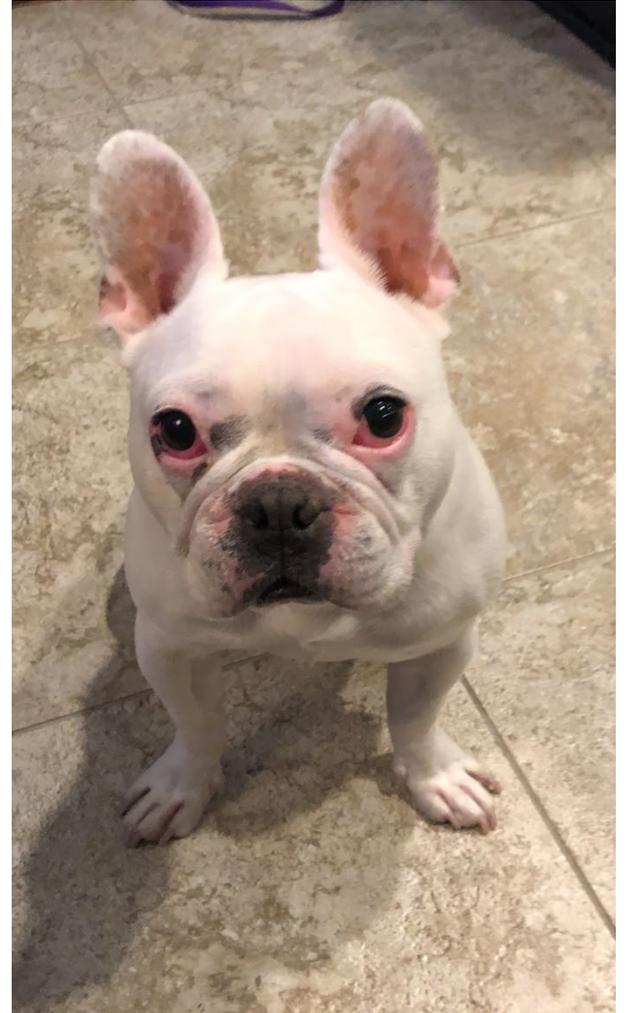
Meditation/Mindfulness

- Key to being truly present/not projecting
- Key to identifying our TRUE feelings
- Acknowledge feelings but don't attach (mountain/clouds)
- Breathing meditation
- Reduces "mental chatter"
- Helps eliminate the "what if's"
- Normal for us all to feel WAVES of emotion now



Gratitude

- Improves sleep
- We become more centered on others/humility
- Reduces depression
- Memorialize for reflection
- Gratitude journal
- Positive state of mind
- Directly correlated with Happiness and Peace
- Builds resiliency
- Boost productivity



Why Are Legal Professionals at High Risk of Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders?

- Conflict driven and adversarial profession
- Emotional detachment
- Win-lose, black-white, often rigid thinking
- Perfectionism
- Excessive self-reliance

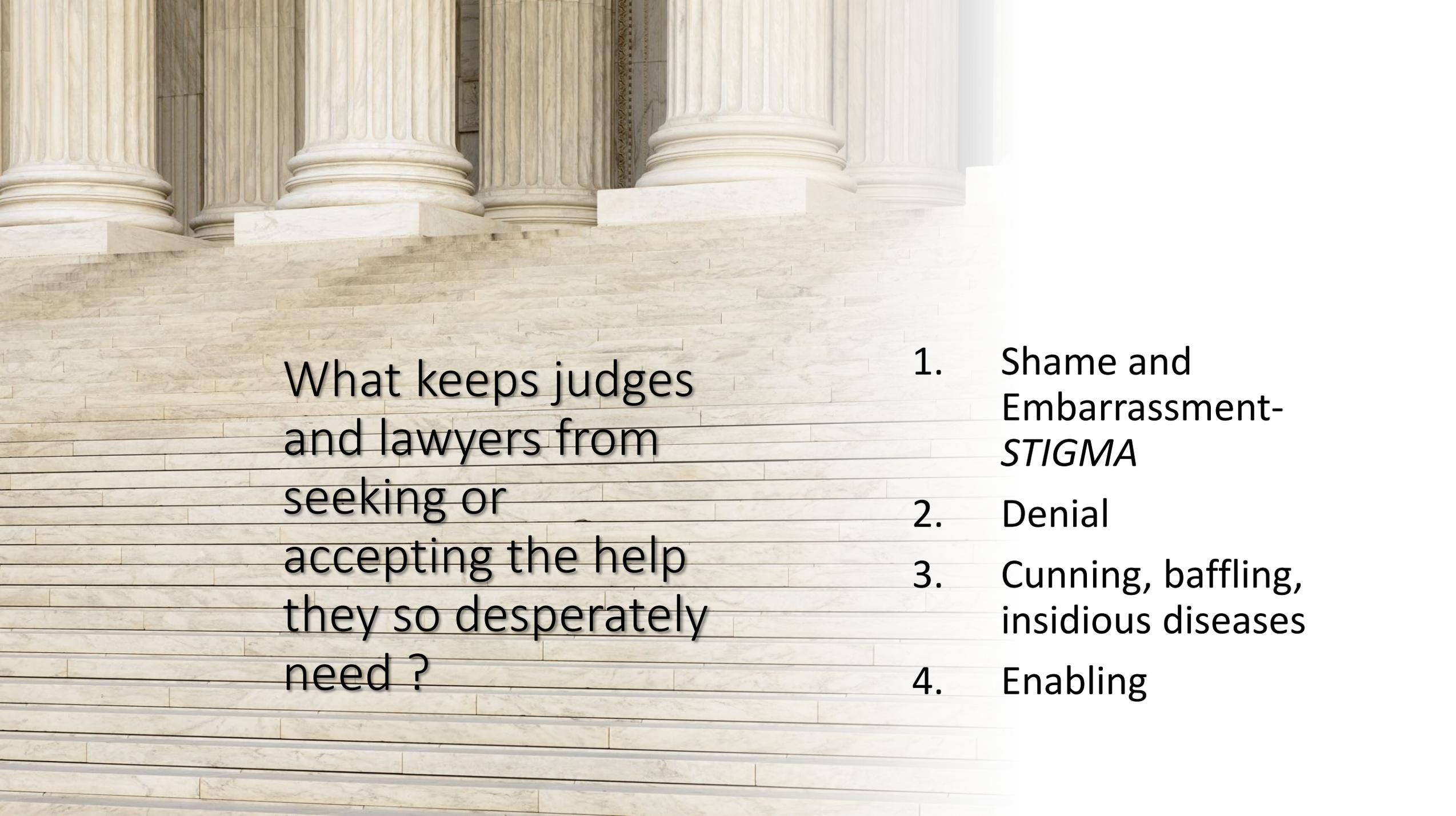
These traits are great for a successful career but not so great for mental health.



Why Can Law Professionals Be Challenging to Approach?

- Highly educated; the '**paralysis of analysis**' effect (adept at rationalization and comparison)
- Excel at debate
- Accustomed to being in control
- Excessive dependence on self-reliance
- Pressure to appear invincible



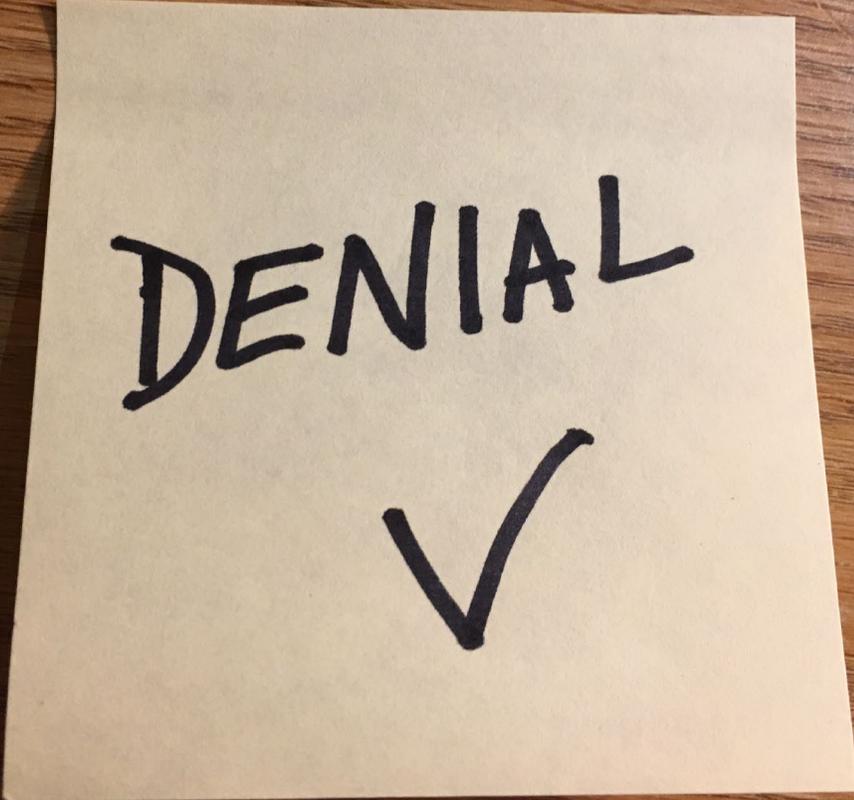


What keeps judges
and lawyers from
seeking or
accepting the help
they so desperately
need ?

1. Shame and
Embarrassment-
STIGMA
2. Denial
3. Cunning, baffling,
insidious diseases
4. Enabling

Dealing with *Denial*

- The most potent barrier
- Psychological defense mechanism
- Rationalize and minimize behavior
- Honestly believe they are under control
- I'm not one of "them" mentality



DENIAL
✓



THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

- Lawyers are trained to deal with and solve problems. Thus, it is most difficult for the attorney to seek help since by doing so he feels he is admitting failure.
- Complicating this problem further is the tendency of the attorney's or judge's peers to indulge in a conspiracy of silence (enabling), and lighten the normal stresses of our profession.

ENABLING

Removes motivation to change

Provides evidence that fuels denial

Allows cons of treatment to outweigh pros

PREVENTS treatment of a progressive disease

Greater harm to career, family and well being

Not good for YOU either !!

THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE ENABLING

Are YOU an enabler ??

1. **RATIONALIZE** your colleague's behavior by blaming other situations ?
2. **CLEANUP** your colleague's messes ?
3. **IGNORE** new bad behaviors ?
4. **HIDE** your thoughts or feelings to avoid angering a colleague ?
5. **LIE & MAKE EXCUSES** for behavior to colleague's clients or coworkers ?

THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE ENABLING

Are YOU an enabler ??

6. **RESENT** your colleague because they don't seem to care ?
7. **HELP** your colleague by loaning money ?
8. **RESCUE** your colleague when impairment gets them into trouble ?
9. **BACKDOWN** from ultimatums that you know you can't meet ?
10. **GIVE A MILLION "LAST CHANCES"** to colleague for change ?

What can
YOU do ??



Although it is difficult, remember that your end goal is to help motivate the impaired lawyer to seek professional help they so desperately need.

To Call LCL...or Not to Call



- I'm ok. I can work this out for myself.
- I'm not like a "real" alcoholic anyway.
- I want help but I don't want anyone to know.
- Will I be reported to Discipline?
- I already tried to get help and it didn't work.
- I don't have the money to pay for treatment.
- What will people say about me if I ask for help ?
- It's no use – nobody will understand – I give up!

To Call LCL or Not to Call

- Is this really any of my business?
- I want to help but I don't want to get involved.
- Will I harm his/her or the firm's reputation?
- Must I report him or her to Discipline?
- I already tried to help and it didn't work.
- Let's wait and see. Maybe it will get better.
- I really don't have time for someone else's problems.



“The Road to He is
Paved with Good
Intentions.”**



when we don't reach out...

- Out of some misplaced sense of loyalty
- Due to fear of anger or retribution
- Out of concern about implications for career and firm
- Because of a 'mind-my-own-business' attitude

...people get sicker and die.

Key Principles

- Don't engage in an argument or debate.
- Don't 'label' someone alcoholic or depressed.
- Don't rely on hearsay.
- Don't use a 'laundry list' to prove your point.
- Make sure your body language and tone of voice conveys concern, not anger or frustration.
- Use leverage as a last resort. Risk of harm to self, clients, firm or others is unacceptable.

If the Risk of Harm is 'Low'

- LAP can help you with “what to say,” “how to say it,” and how to respond.
- Build rapport and trust.
- Segue into what causes you concern.
- Inquire how he is feeling.
- Respect his desire to not “open up.”
- Active listening, not authoritarian approach
- Follow up with LAP to discuss the next approach strategy should the colleague decline help.

If the Risk of Harm is 'High'

LAP will:

- help develop a plan of action and/or connect you with a professional interventionist.
- assist with arranging treatment *before* the approach.

The same 'key principles' apply.

Be prepared to:

- communicate personal and professional boundaries.
- hold her accountable and exert appropriate leverage if she refuses assistance.

The Application of Leverage

CALL LAP FIRST!

LAP will help develop an action plan and/or connect you with a professional interventionist.

- Same principles apply
- Explain how his conduct is causing harm to colleagues, clients, the firm, etc.
- Communicate your personal and professional boundaries. End any residual enabling.
- Be prepared to hold him accountable and exert appropriate leverage.
- Consequences are a fact of life & can lead to a motivation to change.

Brian's Big Five



- Express Gratitude for what you have
- Create 1 hour a day to think and relax
- Do one thing you love to do every day
- Set clear and realistic goals
- Let go of Fear

Why Wait ??

Remember, every month, every day, every *moment* is the opportunity to live a new cycle– we don't have to wait until a new year to start a cycle! Being a healthy lawyer is *part* of being a good lawyer.



Lawyer Mental Health and Substance Use Impairment: Recognition, Risk Factors, and Prevention in the Legal Profession

Thank you all for attending today's Continuing Legal Education program.

If you have any questions that were not answered or would like to contact me for any reason, please call or email me at the following:

Brian S. Quinn, Esq., Education and Outreach Coordinator

LAWYERS CONCERNED FOR LAWYERS of PA, INC.

(610) 659-3345

brian@lclpa.org

Call the Lawyers Assistance Program in **YOUR** State

Directory of Lawyers Assistance Programs by State

- https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/lap_programs_by_state.html

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **2017 CoLAP National Conference for Lawyers Assistance Programs, [Well Being Tool Kit](#)**
- https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer_assistance/ls_colap_Brafford_Tool%20Kit.authcheckdam.pdf

National Task Force on Lawyer Well Being, [The Path to Lawyer Well Being](#)

- <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/ThePathToLawyerWellBeingReportRevFINAL.pdf>
- **Directory of Lawyers Assistance Programs by State**
- https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/lap_programs_by_state.html

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- “Need a helping hand? Here’s what a lawyers assistance program can do for you” http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/podcast_monthly_episode_97
-
- 1-800-273-TALK www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
-
- “What Are Partners’ Duties When a Colleague is Impaired? Draft Opinion Calls for These Steps” http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/what_are_partners_duties_when_a_colleague_is_impaired_draft_opinion_calls_for_these_steps/?utm_source=maestro&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=weekly_email