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**PROGRAM MATERIALS**

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## **Escaping the Perfectionism Trap - A Guide for Lawyers**

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# Escaping the Perfectionism Trap

## A Guide For Lawyers

Presented by:

Brian S. Quinn, Esq.

Education and Outreach Coordinator

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of PA



# Escaping the Perfectionism Trap – A Guide For Lawyers

**Presented by -Brian S. Quinn, Esq. – Education and Outreach Coordinator, LCL of PA**

Brian S. Quinn, Esquire is a licensed attorney in Pennsylvania who currently serves as the Education and Outreach Coordinator for Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania, Inc., a Lawyers Assistance Program established in 1988 for the purpose of helping lawyers, judges and law students recover from alcoholism, drug addiction and mental health disorders.

Mr. Quinn obtained his undergraduate degree in 1970, his law degree in 1973 and a certificate in Drug and Alcohol counselling in 2012, from Villanova University. Prior to his work with Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, he was a private practitioner for over 40 years and has also worked in the field of alcohol and drug counseling in suburban Philadelphia.

Mr. Quinn is a past member of the Board of Directors of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania and served as a peer volunteer prior to accepting his current role as the organization's Educator in 2017. He has written and presented on lawyer wellness topics to law firms, Bar Associations and legal education providers for state, national and international groups as well.

# 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](http://www.lclpa.org)**

CONSULT THE ETHICAL RULES IN YOUR STATE  
ALL LAWYERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE **NOT** THE SAME !!

- Although many Lawyers Assistance Programs *may* follow the same practices, it is **always** advisable to consult the Rules of Professional Conduct and the Judicial Code of your jurisdiction in order to ascertain the rules governing the duty to report misconduct imposed on both lawyers and judges, **especially if there may be a connection to the misconduct and impairment as a result of alcohol, substance use or mental health issues.**

## We Protect Your Identity and Information

LAP's do **not**\* report or disclose any identifying information to any Court, Judicial Conduct Board, Disciplinary Board, Board of Law Examiners or any other agency of the Court; nor do we report or disclose any identifying information to State or 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 LAP services.**

**\*CONSULT YOUR STATE'S RULES OF PROF. CONDUCT**

# Guidance From the Court

PA Rules of Professional Conduct address that concern by providing an exception to the duty to report: The Rules may not require disclosure of information otherwise protected or information gained by a lawyer or judge while participating in an approved lawyers assistance program. **See PA RPC Rule 8.3(c)**

The Court believes that “... **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)

# MODEL RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

## Rule 8.3: Reporting Professional Misconduct

(a) A lawyer who knows that another lawyer has committed a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct that raises a substantial question as to that lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness or fitness as a lawyer in other respects, shall inform the appropriate professional authority.

(b) A lawyer who knows that a judge has committed a violation of applicable rules of judicial conduct that raises a substantial question as to the judge's fitness for office shall inform the appropriate authority.

# GUIDANCE FROM THE COURT

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

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\*Check the Rules of Professional Conduct for your state

# 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](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/lap_programs_by_state.html)

# 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 < 30 yrs. old



# Mental Health By The Numbers

- 36% use all of their vacation time
- 35% do not feel safe discussing their mental health at work
- 36% feel the billable hour has a *major* effect on stress level
- **62%** know a colleague who is *depressed* and
- **50%** know a colleague with an alcohol problem
- **72%** know a colleague who is stressed

# Mental Health By The Numbers

- 65% feel they could NOT take an extended leave from employment to tend to mental health issues
- 78% felt it would hurt career trajectory
- 77% were fearful of what the firm would think
- 56% felt they had too much work to take an extended leave

# Perfectionism



# What Is Perfectionism ?

Perfectionism, in psychology, is a broad personality trait characterized by a person's concern with striving for flawlessness and perfection and is accompanied by critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.





## What Is Perfectionism ?

Those with perfectionism are often well accomplished.

# How Common is Perfectionism ?

While the general population contains approximately 30% perfectionists, the percentage of perfectionists among the gifted population is close to 80%.



# What Causes Perfectionism ?



- Anxiety
- Fear
- Genetics
- Age
- Environment



# Perfectionism in the Legal Workplace

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- Complexity and Volume of Work
- Client Expectations
- Professional Standards and Ethics
- Personality Traits and Education
- Peer Pressure and Competition

# What Causes Perfectionism ?

Some believe perfectionism is driven by certain personality traits, such as fear, self –efficacy and childhood experiences.

Others believe it is our very culture that reinforces what is not a mental health condition as much as a *phenomenon created by societal expectations.*



# Psychological Factors

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- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Atelophobia – fear of imperfection
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder





# Environmental/Developmental Factors

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- Social Media & Comparison
- Academic and Workplace Culture
- Parenting Styles
- Educational Pressure



# Types of Perfectionism

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- **Self-oriented** perfectionism is imposing an unrealistic desire to be perfect on oneself-  
*“When I am working on something, I cannot relax until it is perfect”*
- **Other-oriented** perfectionism means imposing unrealistic standards of perfection on others-  
*“If I ask someone to do something, I expect it to be done flawlessly”*
- **Socially-prescribed** perfectionism involves perceiving unrealistic expectations of perfection from others-  
*“The better I do, the better I am expected to do”*

# Perfectionism

Perfectionists set excessively high goals for themselves, and when they fail to reach a goal, they experience major self-doubt and worry about measuring up.



# Adaptive Perfectionism

Perfectionism that is healthy and normal and relates to an intense effort that is put forth to achieve a certain goal. Adaptively perfectionistic individuals set high, but realistic standards, and don't resort to harsh self-criticism when these standards are not reached.



# Maladaptive Perfectionism

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- In contrast, *maladaptive* perfectionism can be characterized by perfectionism that gets in the way of leading a successful and happy life. A need to be in control of every aspect of one's life and environment.



# Mental Health Implications of Maladaptive Perfectionism

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- Increased Risk of Anxiety and Depression
- Burnout and Exhaustion
- Negative Self Evaluation
- Negative Impact on Physical Health





# Performance Implications of Maladaptive Perfectionism

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- Fixed Mindset & Reduced Self-Efficacy
- Procrastination – "Perfectionist Paralysis"
- Difficulty Delegating
- Lower Levels of "Grit"

# Superwoman/man

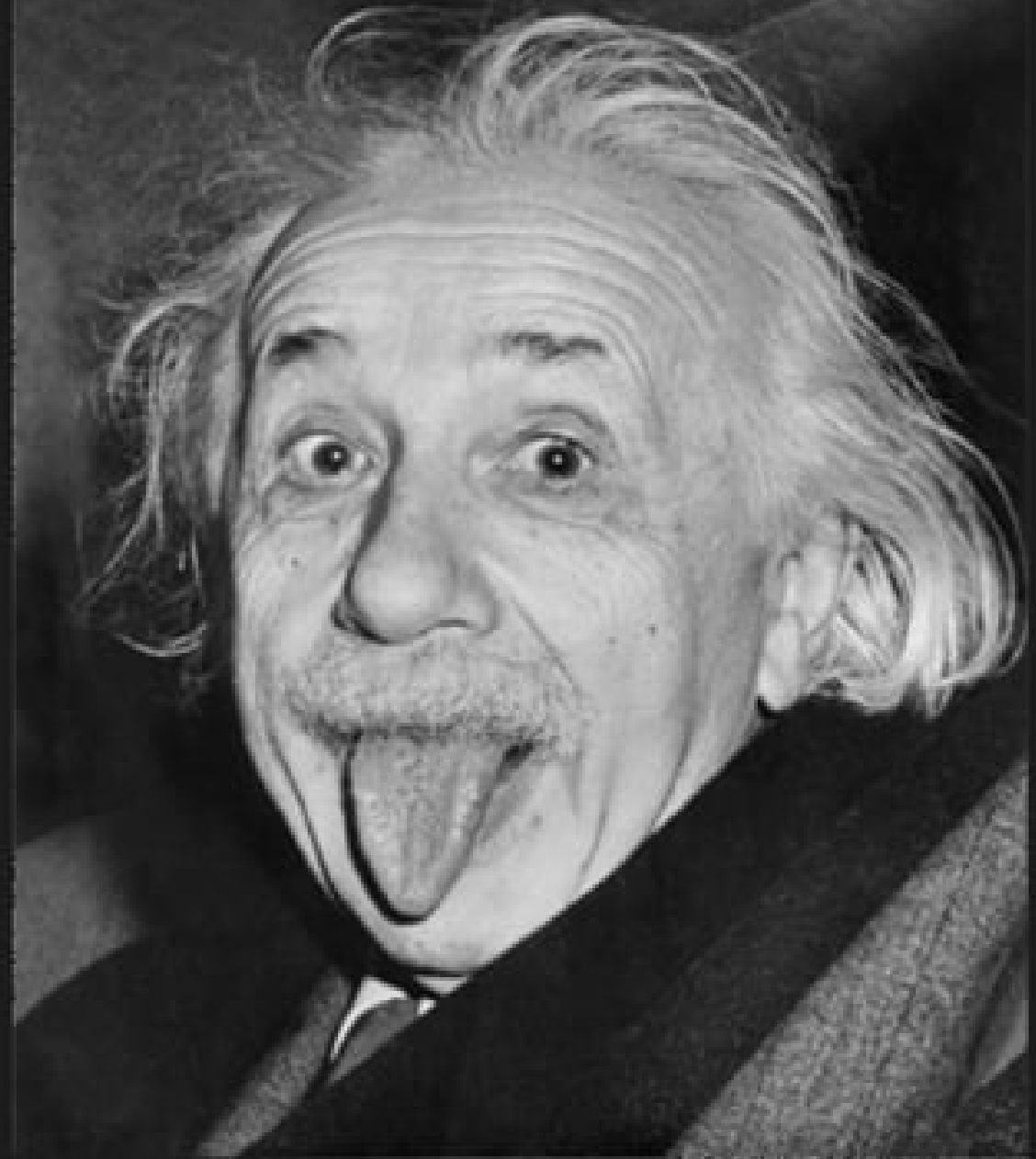
- Convinced you're a phony and everyone else is the "real deal" ?
- Push yourself to work harder to "measure up"?
- Are you the last to leave the office even after your work is completed ?
- Do you get stressed when not busy with work ?
- Have hobbies and passions been sacrificed to work ?



# The Natural Genius

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- The natural “genius” judges themselves by the ease and speed at which they accomplish a task.
- Were you a “straight A” student who excelled without much effort ?
- Do you reject the idea of a mentor ?
- Do you feel ashamed when faced with a setback ?



# The Soloist



- Asking for help= phoniness
- Refuse assistance
- “I don’t need anyone’s help.”

# The Expert



# "I Don't Belong"

Perfectionism and *imposter syndrome* often go hand in hand.

Success is rarely satisfying because you always believe you could've done even better.



# Do YOU Ever Feel Like This ?

1. I can trick people into thinking I know more than I do.
2. When I receive a compliment, I worry I won't live up to it.
3. I avoid having people critique or evaluate me.
4. Do you feel "pushed" by fear instead of "pulled" by desire?
5. I mostly remember my failures instead of my successes.
6. I rarely perform as well as I would like to.
7. Do you feel "almost perfect" is a failure?

# Do YOU Ever Feel Like This ?

8. Are you so focused on goals that you can't enjoy the process?
9. If I'm not recognized as the "best", I feel inferior and depressed.
10. I worry about succeeding even though I'm told that I am
11. Are you so worried about imperfection that you procrastinate?
12. I feel those around me are more competent compared to me.
13. I rarely perform as well as I would like to.
14. Do you fear trying something new?
15. **Are you so rigid and self critical that you isolate?**

# Trauma-Centered Perfectionism

For individuals experiencing trauma-centered perfectionism, their only coping mechanism to manage feelings of self-doubt and shame that may stem from a belief of unworthiness or inadequacy is to strive for perfection.



The trauma centered perfectionist strives to conceal their perceived flaws and vulnerabilities, leaving them feeling inadequate *all the time* as they seek to quell their inner turmoil.

# Stress or Distress ?

- Some stress is healthy. Positive stressors can energize and motivate lawyers 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.



# Stress or Distress ?

- Gradual, incremental increases in responsibilities, duties, pressures and demands at home and work combined with long workdays and weeks is risky.
- We stay busy and “stuff” our feelings.
- Even relaxing can cause us to feel distress.
- We become unaware that we have lost balance in our lives.



# BURNOUT



# WHAT IS BURNOUT ?

- Constant anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Changes in personality
- Irritability
- Pessimism
- Obsessive thoughts
- Feelings of inadequacy and dread



# WHAT IS BURNOUT ?

- Sleep disturbances
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue
- Disengagement
- Depression
- Sense of helplessness
- Lost or diminished motivation
- Heart palpitations.



# EFFECTS OF BURNOUT

- Less efficient
- Waste more time
- Self destructive tendencies
- Work quantity and quality declines
- Negative attitude towards those around you
- The feeling no one cares
- Unrelieved, may harden into a fixed element of your outlook
- Left unattended, can contribute to challenges to ethical duties, particularly communication and diligence

# Why Lawyers ?

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

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



In other words...

Our personalities and our  
Profession put us at high  
risk.



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





Impossible

Set *REALISTIC*  
Goals for Yourself

# 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!**

# USE QUICK STRESS- BUSTERS

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

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

---

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

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Maintain a sense of humor about yourself.

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

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Prioritize at work and home and manage your time effectively.

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



**SET BOUNDARIES**

# 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.

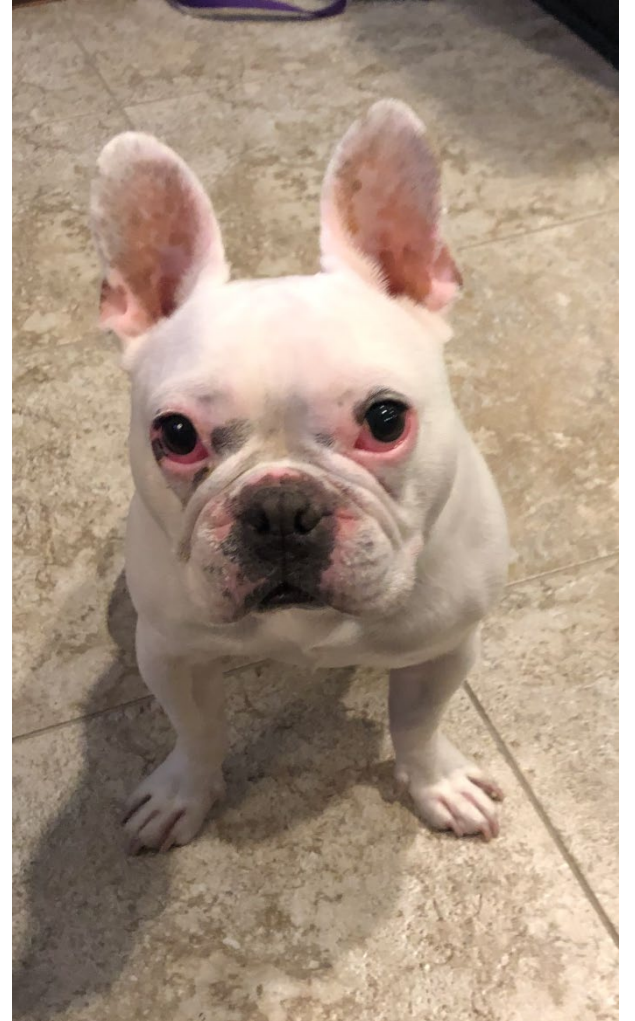
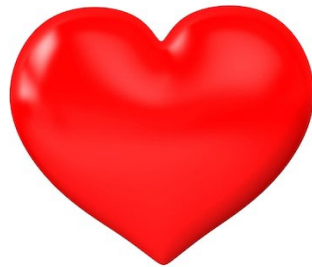
# Meditation/Mindfulness

- 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



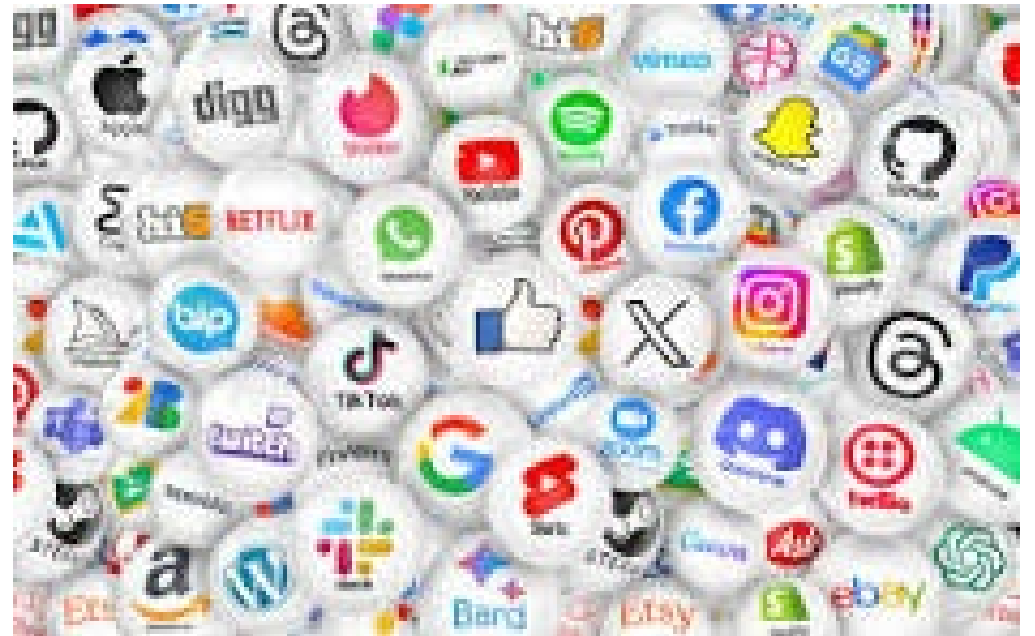
# Social comparisons are DANGEROUS!

**What is a reasonable social comparison?**

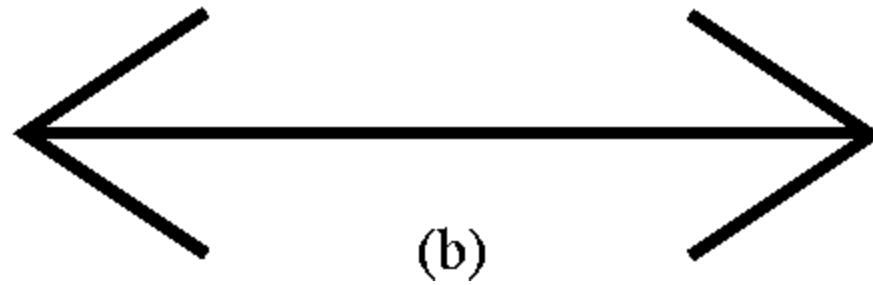
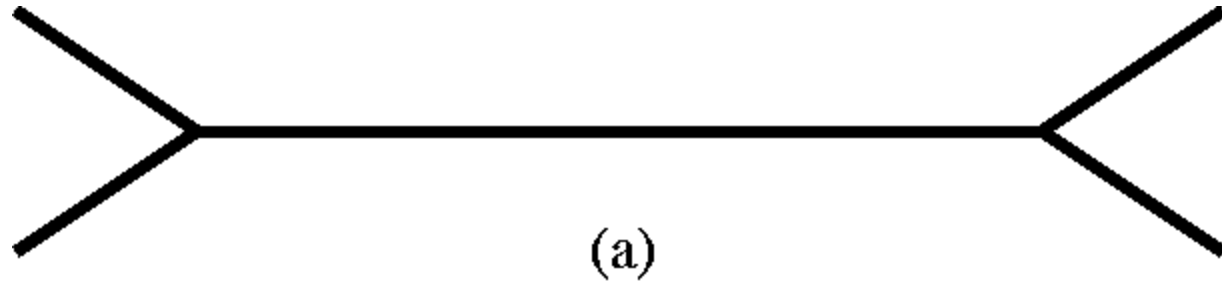
When someone asks you if you think you are active, who do you think of?

When someone asks if you are happy, who do you think of?

We have unrealistic comparisons.



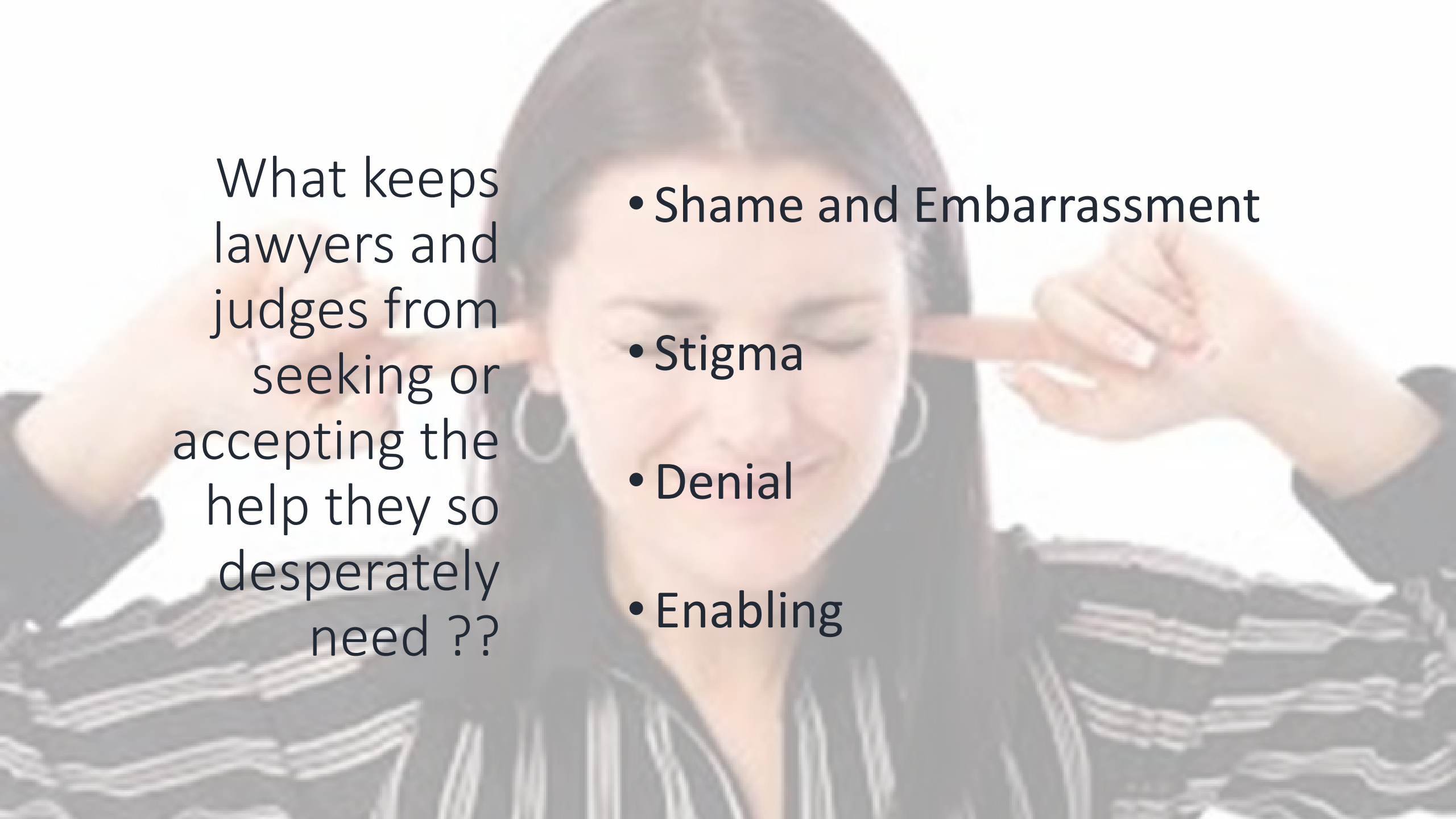
Things are not  
always what  
they appear to  
be...



# Give Yourself a Chance for Success !

1. Don't isolate – break the silence
2. Separate feelings from fact
3. Accentuate the positive
4. Develop a healthy response to mistakes
5. Give yourself break- reward yourself !
6. Remember three letters – YET
7. “Surf the urge” to react
8. Build a strong support system
9. Look around
10. Fake it ‘til you make it



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark patterned top and large hoop earrings, is covering her ears with both hands. Her eyes are closed and she has a slight, pained or distressed expression. The background is a plain, light color.

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

- Shame and Embarrassment
- Stigma
- Denial
- 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





# 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.

# What can YOU do ??



Although it is difficult, remember that your end goal is to help motivate the impaired lawyer or judge 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 want help but I don't want anyone to know.
- 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.



# *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



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## **Escaping the Perfectionism Trap- A Guide For Lawyers**

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](mailto:brian@lclpa.org)**

# How to Join the National Well-Being MOVEMENT

## **“WELL-BEING TOOLKIT FOR LAWYERS AND LEGAL EMPLOYERS”**

Created By Anne M. Brafford For Use By The American Bar Association

[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer\\_assistance/lis\\_colap\\_well-being\\_toolkit\\_for\\_lawyers\\_legal\\_employers.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer_assistance/lis_colap_well-being_toolkit_for_lawyers_legal_employers.authcheckdam.pdf)

## **“Well-Being Toolkit Nutshell: 80 Tips For Lawyer Thriving”**

[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer\\_assistance/lis\\_colap\\_Well-Being\\_Toolkit\\_Flier\\_Nutshell.authcheckdam.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer_assistance/lis_colap_Well-Being_Toolkit_Flier_Nutshell.authcheckdam.pdf)

# National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being Recommendations

**"The Path to Lawyer Well-Being:  
Practical Recommendations For Positive Change"**

**<http://lawyerwellbeing.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Lawyer-Wellbeing-Report.pdf>**