



Lawyers Risk Purchasing Group

Taking Control of Your Wellbeing

Fourth Annual Lawyer Wellness CLE Webinar

Thursday, December 14, 2023
12 Noon CST
(live webinar)

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Winston-Salem, NC

Introduction

You already know the law can be stressful and demanding, and you've seen the surveys that show widespread anxiety, depression and substance abuse in the profession.

So what can you do about it?

How can you improve the quality of your life and law practice?

The secret is **Taking Control of Your Wellbeing**. Nobody can do it for you. It won't happen by itself. You have to personally seize the reins and take action.

This webinar will show you how to do just that – right here, right now – by examining the latest data on full-spectrum wellness, identifying best practices for your office, and giving you simple tips and tools to get started on a healthier and more productive law life.

The program will also highlight key Rules of Professional Conduct, relevant ethics opinions, and the ABA National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being.

1. Take This Wellbeing Self-Assessment

Wellbeing is more than just not being sick. It covers the full spectrum of health: mental, emotional, physical and mental. It means you feel good about your life (at work and home) and look forward to the future. When you experience wellbeing, you are able to operate at peak potential.

Personal wellbeing and professional wellbeing are not separate things. They're inextricably connected. What happens at work affects what happens at home, and vice versa.

Gauge your wellbeing with the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, an internationally validated assessment using 14 simple, strength-based questions about your thoughts and feelings over the last two weeks. It takes only a few minutes to complete. Here are three sample questions:

1. I've been feeling optimistic about the future

- a) None of the time*
- b) Rarely*
- c) Some of the time*
- d) Often*
- e) All of the time*

2. I've Been Feeling Useful

- a) *None of the time*
- b) *Rarely*
- c) *Some of the time*
- d) *Often*
- e) *All of the time*

3. I've Been Feeling Relaxed

- a) *None of the time*
- b) *Rarely*
- c) *Some of the time*
- d) *Often*
- e) *All of the time*

Take the [Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Assessment](#).

2. Stress in Small Firms

The bad news: nearly 75 percent of employees in small and midsize law firms have experienced stress, burnout or overwhelm in the past 12 months.

The good news: even so, a whopping 99 percent say they like “at least some aspects of their work.”

That’s according to the inaugural [Midsize Law Firm Priorities Report 2023](#), which surveyed lawyers, paralegals and administrative support professionals at mid-sized law firms.

“Of the lawyers and paralegals who responded, the greatest sources of their stress are understaffing and client demands,” says [LawSites founder Bob Ambrogi about the report](#). “For administrative support staff, the greatest sources of stress are team or cultural issues and lack of support from management. But even though many of these legal professionals are feeling stressed, they overwhelmingly agree that technology can help their firms adapt and is critical to the satisfaction of their firms’ clients. And, despite the stress, almost all professionals at mid-sized firms (99.6 percent) say they like at least some aspects of their work.”

Other takeaways from the [Midsize Law Firm Priorities Report 2023](#):

- The number one item on midsize firms’ to-do lists is growing revenue (47 percent), followed by managing the cost of doing business (35 percent) and recruiting and retaining talent (35 percent).
- Fifty-five (55) percent said what they like best about their job is helping people solve problems, while 43 percent appreciated the opportunity to learn and evolve.
- People at midsize firms also like being part of a team (43 percent), the structure and logic of legal work (38 percent), working with a range of different types of clients (37 percent), work-life balance (35 percent), remuneration and other benefits (30 percent), professional opportunities for career progression (28 percent), working with inspiring legal industry leaders (26 percent), and being part of a firm that advocates for my personal beliefs (25 percent).
- What legal professionals dislike most is too much time spent on routine, administrative tasks.
- Legal professionals who work remotely more than a quarter of their time were significantly less likely to report burnout and stress.

3. Take a Breathing Break

Feeling stressed, pressured or overwhelmed? Deep breathing can work wonders.

With your eyes either open or closed, take a series of long, deep breaths. Be aware of the feeling of the air coming in your nose and out your mouth. Try to fill your lungs, but don't hold your breath. Deep breathing helps combat the flight-or-flight reflex, which is the body's natural response to stress, by slowing our breathing and heart rate and relaxing our muscles.

Pro Tip: "Thinking the word 'relax' as you exhale turns the word into a *cue*. The brain will then associate this word with the action of inducing a state of relaxation throughout your body." Source: [How to Do Deep Breathing Exercises \(verywellhealth.com\)](#)

Learn more: [Relaxation Techniques for Health: What You Need To Know](#)

4. Fifteen Minutes for Self-Care

Here are some other ways to create an oasis of calm in your busy day – in 15 minutes or less.

- **Put yourself in time-out.** As a gift, not punishment. Find a quiet spot where you can sit undisturbed, with eyes closed, for a few minutes. You'll emerge refreshed, and perhaps with a new perspective. Some firms set aside "sanity" space in the office for meditation and centering.
- **Move your body.** Just 11 minutes of exercise a day can increase your life span, says [this 2020 study](#). Pretty much any type of movement counts.
- **Go for a walk outside.** You'll get out of your head and into nature, which is always affirming.
- **Make a social connection.** The law can be isolating. The solution is human contact. "Take five minutes to feel seen and heard each day — and return the favor for someone else," says [CNN](#). PS: Zoom meetups are better than none at all.
- **Eat a healthy snack.** Stock your breakroom with fruits, veggies and nutritious foods that will boost energy, not sap it.

5. Be a Rock, Not an Egg

Is your law practice an egg or rock? Or to put it another way, is your practice fragile or anti-fragile?

The answer could determine whether you collapse under pressure or grow stronger. A fragile law practice (think: egg) is one that struggles under pressure and has difficulty dealing with change. An antifragile firm (think: rock) blossoms in the face of adversity.

"[How] law firms respond to stressors can be a source of competitive advantage," says [Clio CEO Jack Newton in this blogpost](#). "The antifragile law firm is one that is protected from prediction errors, market volatility, and adverse events. If your law firm is well-positioned to embrace unexpected change, it will not only survive but thrive in times of uncertainty."

The concept of antifragility derives from the book *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, by Nassim Nicholas Taleb.

Here are some ways to become a "rock" star, [courtesy of Jack Newton and Clio](#):

- **Build connections.** "Lawyers need community to succeed," says [Clio](#). "Finding ways to build and reinforce bonds with colleagues is essential for any law firm."
- **Be client-centered.** "Understand what your clients want by building deep empathy for and knowledge of them—and then, of course, give them what they want."
- **Think creatively.** Stop trying the same old solutions for the same old problems.
- **Use technology to lighten your load.** Make strategic use of technology by letting software take some of the administrative chores off your plate.

6. ABA National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being

“We are at a crossroads. The legal profession is struggling,” according to the ABA Task Force on Lawyer Well-being. “To be a good lawyer, one has to be a healthy lawyer. To maintain public confidence in the profession, to meet the need for innovation in how we deliver legal services, to increase access to justice, and to reduce the level of toxicity that has allowed mental health and substance use disorders to fester among our colleagues, we have to act now. Change will require a wide-eyed and candid assessment of our members’ state of being, accompanied by courageous commitment to re-envisioning what it means to live the life of a lawyer.”

ABA Well-Being Campaign Pledge

Recognizing that high levels of problematic substance use and mental health distress present a significant challenge for the legal profession, and acknowledging that more can and should be done to improve the health and well-being of lawyers, we the attorneys of _____ hereby pledge our support for this innovative campaign and will work to adopt and prioritize its seven-point framework for building a better future.

1. Provide enhanced and robust education to attorneys and staff on topics related to well-being, mental health, and substance use disorders.
2. Disrupt the status quo of drinking-based events: (a) Challenge the expectation that all events include alcohol; seek creative alternatives. (b) Ensure there are always appealing nonalcoholic alternatives when alcohol is served.
3. Develop visible partnerships with outside resources committed to reducing substance use disorders and mental health distress in the profession: healthcare insurers, lawyer assistance programs, EAPs, and experts in the field.
4. Provide confidential access to addiction and mental health experts and resources, including free, inhouse, self-assessment tools.
5. Develop proactive policies and protocols to support assessment and treatment of substance use and mental health problems, including a defined back-to-work policy following treatment.
6. Actively and consistently demonstrate that help-seeking and self-care are core cultural values, by regularly supporting programs to improve physical, mental and emotional well-being.
7. Highlight the adoption of this well-being framework to attract and retain the best lawyers and staff.

DOWNLOAD THE ABA WELL-BEING PLEDGE

7. Ask for Help

- Be alert for warning signs.
- Contact an experienced healthcare provider.
- Talk to a friend, family member or trusted colleague.
- Get in touch with your state bar’s Lawyer Assistance Program or similar program.
- Go to a qualified source. Random venting or spilling your guts to someone who can’t help will only worsen matters.
- Make it clear you need help. Don’t waste time telling someone about a “friend” who might have a problem, when it’s really you who needs help.
- Be as specific as possible. Don’t downplay or minimize your distress. Try to name what you believe to be the source of the problem.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER & MODERATOR

SPEAKER

Colleen L. Byers, JD, MBA, RYT200 is the founding principal of Colleen Byers Mediation, LLC. A seasoned business, trust, estate and fiduciary litigator, Colleen’s national mediation practice focuses on resolving partnership disputes, multi-generational family business issues, trust, estate, and fiduciary disputes outside of the courtroom. Colleen is triple certified by the North Carolina Dispute Resolution Commission to mediate Superior Court; Family Financial; and matters pending before the Clerk of

Superior Court. In 2020, Colleen was honored to be named by NC Lawyers Weekly as the Lawyer of the Year. Leveraging her communication and negotiation skills, Colleen also serves as a professional development coach and consultant for lawyers and law firm leaders who are ready to expand their impact. Through one-on-one strategy sessions and group workshops and trainings, she teaches lawyers how to negotiate better, transform conflict, and improve well-being to achieve unprecedented results. A registered yoga teacher, Colleen regularly speaks on topics, including The Competitive Advantage of Mindfulness in Negotiations, teaches yoga for high-achieving professionals, and facilitates corporate retreats. Colleen enjoys outdoor adventures with her husband, their two daughters, and their faithful rescue German Shepherd.

Email colleen@byersmediation.com and follow her on LinkedIn.

Moderator

Jay Reeves, JD, is the Risk Pro for Alta Pro Lawyers Risk Purchasing Group. He practiced law in South Carolina and North Carolina for nearly 40 years, concentrating in representing attorneys in ethics, licensing and disciplinary cases. He has given more than 250 presentations on legal ethics and professionalism to bar groups, law firms and law schools in the U.S. and Canada. He was Vice-President of Bar Cares of North Carolina and served on the NC Bar Association CLE advisory panel. He is founder and owner of Your Law Life LLC. He is author of the law column “Ask the Risk Man” and the book “The Most Powerful Attorney in the World.”

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