

Lawyers ASSISTANCE

By Dr. Angela White-Bazile, Esq.

TIME TO REBOOT

Everyone admires Sam. Sam is kind and intelligent. Sam has a beautiful family and is always well-dressed. Sam made the “Top 40 Under 40” List for three consecutive years and reached the pinnacle of a lawyer’s career at an early age.

Sam looks great on the outside, but no one can see the mounting struggles on the inside.

“One drink won’t hurt to unwind,” Sam thought. Then the drinking increased to nightly.

“I can survive on four hours of sleep,” Sam reasoned. “This is a big case.”

Sam ignores the headache that will not go away, the muscle pains and digestive issues. Sam is ignoring the drastic weight changes. Sam thinks nothing of increasing the dosage of over-the-counter medications — something to sleep, something to rise and definitely a little something to relax.

No one notices that Sam is quickly spiraling out of control because Sam shows up every day and continues to generate high-quality work.

Sam could be any one of us.

Social distancing and remote work made it easier to hide from colleagues, but we could not escape ourselves. We were forced to spend time with ourselves and stare in the mirror to evaluate who was staring back.

Since returning to brick-and-mortar offices, who checks on you and sees beyond the forced smile, beyond the suit and beyond the conquer-at-any-cost determination? Do you know what is going on with your colleagues and those closest to you? Have you taken a moment to check on them personally, especially after seeing a slight change in their behavior and personality?

Some gamble. Some abuse and misuse substances. Someone else may lash out and have violent urges. These



habits — including smoking, drinking, abuse of prescription medicine to cope, sleeping little, barely exercising, eating unhealthy foods, acting highly irritated, excessively social or quietly isolated — create a cycle that can impair the ability to practice law competently.

Practicing law is a vital public service, so what happens when practicing law takes a physical and emotional toll on us? Who advises the public adviser?

Mental health and substance abuse issues are well documented among lawyers who, like anyone else, encounter stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, addiction, insomnia and suicidal ideations.¹ Too often, we feel helpless as substance abuse, mental health or other personal issues worsen and threaten our careers and lives.

Lawyer assistance programs, bar associations and law schools all around the country have been encouraging an open and honest conversation about mental health and other issues and concerns that negatively affect the legal profession, such as stress.

The American Bar Association (ABA) lists 12 common symptoms of stress — headache; muscle tension or pain; chest pain; fatigue; change in sex

drive; stomach upset; sleep problems; anxiety; restlessness; lack of motivation or focus; irritability or anger; and sadness or depression.²

When ignored, stress can lead to burnout, substance abuse, or physical or mental illness, such as depression and suicide.³

Deadlines, billing pressures, client demands, long hours, changing laws, competitive environments, evolving legal technologies and climbing law school debt are just a few aspects of being a lawyer that can be stressful.⁴ Parents also are facing additional stress with concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their children’s social development, academic development and emotional health.⁵

How do you cope in the moments when your thoughts are overwhelming, when an outcome for a client will be undesirable, or when conflicts at work and home are happening simultaneously?⁶

How many of us disregard how we feel to get more work done, have an extra coffee, eat something sugary, or drink a high-voltage energy drink or loaded tea to push through fatigue rather than slowing down or resting?⁷

Mindfulness and meditation are en-

couraged, with numerous studies revealing that both can reduce anxiety and teach you how to slow your thoughts down and not become overwhelmed in stressful situations.⁸ Mindfulness makes way for positive thinking as you become aware of your feelings, thoughts, actions and surroundings.⁹

Some of us may need to turn off our cell phones and other devices. We are inundated with emails, texts and Zoom meeting requests, but social media also impacts our overall well-being. Social media platforms have emerged as popular venues for sharing individual experiences, seeking information and offering support. However, social media use has been linked to depression, anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem.¹⁰ A break from smartphones, and especially social media, increases productivity, lifts your mood and allows you to spend more time with loved ones.¹¹

Remember that social media is not reality. Most people only post an achievement. They rarely show long nights, never-ending tears or the overwhelming moments when it feels as if breath has left the body. Many only show the highlights of their lives, which can be demotivating. Some only show their successes, but never touch their experiences of defeat or distress.

We should be more willing to admit that we do not always have “it” altogether. We also need to stop comparing ourselves to others. Everyone has his/her own path and own story. Focus on your lane and what makes you joyful.

Also, think about your mindset. When you think about yourself and why you may not be achieving your goals, do you ever consider that you may be standing in your own way? What may be stopping you or holding you back is you. Do you ever down-talk yourself or come off as negative about your work, others or your life? Sometimes you are the negative energy but know that you have the power to change that.

To improve your well-being, first recognize that the most exciting, challenging and significant relationship of all is the one you have with yourself. Second, make your mental health a priority. It is okay not to be okay. Take care



J·L·A·P

JUDGES AND LAWYERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, INC.

*Your call is absolutely
confidential as a matter of law.*

Toll-free (866)354-9334

www.louisianajlap.com

Email: jlap@louisianajlap.com

of yourself first and it will be easier to care for others, including family, friends and the greater community. Third, spend time outside of work with family or socializing with friends. Use time away from work to intentionally recharge and create balance to avoid burnout.¹²

Some coping strategies for stress suggested by the ABA include realizing your limitations, setting healthy boundaries, prioritizing, improving communication, sharing your feelings with someone trustworthy and nonjudgmental, eating and sleeping well, and seeking help.¹³

It is time to reboot! Know that JLAP is here to serve and support you. We work with judges, lawyers, law students, family members and the entire legal community. Our areas of support include aging, alcohol and drugs, compassion fatigue, depression, gambling, suicide prevention, wellness and other mental health concerns. JLAP is here if you need someone to talk to.

Social media offers the option of using a filter before posting a picture or video. Filters create false illusions. Now is the time to remove all the filters. Yes, reboot!

To learn more or seek confidential, non-disciplinary help with personal issues, including mental health and substance abuse, you can contact the professional clinical staff at JLAP at (985)778-0571, email jlap@louisianajlap.com, or visit our website at www.louisianajlap.com. The call costs nothing but could make an enormous difference.

We are a CONFIDENTIAL Safe Haven of Healing.

FOOTNOTES

1. Nefra MacDonald, “Work-Life Balance for Lawyers,” Clio (Feb. 28, 2022), www.clio.com/blog/lawyer-work-life-balance/.

2. “Stress,” American Bar Association (Jan. 18, 2022), www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/stress/.

3. “How to Handle Stress While Practicing Law,” Partner Up LLC (April 19, 2019), www.partnerupcoaching.com/how-to-handle-stress-while-practicing-law/; John Allison, “How to Reduce Stress in the Legal Profession,” NWSidebar (Jan. 14, 2019), <https://nwsidebar.wsba.org/2019/01/14/how-to-reduce-stress-in-the-legal-profession/>.

4. Sally Kane, “The 10 Challenges about a Career as a Lawyer,” The Balance Careers (Nov. 20, 2019), www.thebalancecareers.com/lawyer-career-drawbacks-2164594#:~:text=The%20Stress&text=Deadlines%2C%20billing%20pressures%2C%20client%20demands,no%20wonder%20lawyers%20are%20stressed.

5. Kristi Pahr, “American Parents are Ridiculously Stressed Out, Survey Shows,” Fatherly (March 12, 2022), www.fatherly.com/news/american-parents-are-ridiculously-stressed-out-survey-shows/.

6. MacDonald, *supra* note 1.

7. Stephanie Recupero, “Reducing Stress as a Lawyer: Avoiding Burnout,” Practus (Sept. 12, 2021), <https://practus.com/reducing-stress-as-a-lawyer-how-to-avoid-lawyer-burnout/>; Aytekin Tank, “6 red flags your body is breaking down from overwork,” Fast Company (Jan. 26, 2022), www.fastcompany.com/90715596/6-red-flags-your-body-is-breaking-down-from-overwork.

8. MacDonald, *supra* note 1.

9. Recupero, *supra* note 7.

10. Christine M. Stabler, “The Effects of Social Media on Mental Health,” Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health (Sept. 1, 2021), <https://lancastergeneralhealth.org/health-hub-home/2021/september/the-effects-of-social-media-on-mental-health>.

11. Helen Lee Bouygues, “Social Media Is a Public Health Crisis. Let’s Treat It Like One,” US News (July 20, 2021), www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2021-07-20/social-media-is-a-public-health-crisis.

12. Anne E. Collier, “The Thriving Lawyer: Compartmentalize Your Stress to Optimize Success,” American Bar Association (March 1, 2022), www.americanbar.org/groups/law_practice/publications/law_practice_magazine/2022/ma22/ttl/.

13. “Stress,” American Bar Association, *supra* note 2.

Dr. Angela White-Bazile, Esq., is the executive director of the Louisiana Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP) and can be reached at (985)778-0571, toll-free (866)354-9334 or by email at jlap@louisianajlap.com.

