

Lawyers ASSISTANCE

By Dr. Angela White-Bazile, Esq.

THIS ROUND IS ON ME

It is another great victory for the firm. More clients are excited about their favorable judgments. The drinks were flowing nonstop because everyone was celebrating. The music was loud, and the lights were blinding. People were laughing and dancing, and no one had a care in the world. He could barely keep his eyes open as the DJ announced the establishment was closing. He made his way home in the early morning hours, running through traffic lights, ignoring stop signs and barely avoiding crashing into parked cars. He passed out and . . .

What happened could have been avoided, but many missed or ignored the signs of trouble. Initially, he saved the drinks for after work. However, his job performance steadily declined. His speech was slurred when he made his appearance before the judge. He fell asleep while waiting for his case to be called. His responses to discovery requests were late. He forgot about a meeting he scheduled with his client. What started as periodic or social drinking spiraled out of control quickly. He concealed alcohol in his coffee mug, water bottles and tumblers, always finding ways to hide his alcohol dependence. He did not reach out to anyone because he was worried about what others would think of him if he admitted he had a drinking problem.

The reasons and rationales for drinking are endless — on the weekends to release tension and relax, a desire to escape from reality and forget miseries and problems of life, loneliness, feelings of inadequacy, depression, anxiety, peer pressure, unemployment, etc. Whether it be heavy workloads, long hours, competitive nature or client demands, everyone in the legal profession feels some form of stress or pressure.

How do you cope with the many



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: jl原因@louisianajlap.com

pressures of life, and what role does alcohol play?

Has “just one drink” each night turned into three or four? Is it hard to get through the day without alcohol? Are you unable to quit drinking on your own? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, there may be cause for concern.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that more than 140,000 people died from excessive alcohol use in the United States during 2015-19, more than 380 deaths per day.¹

Numerous studies have shown that lawyers suffer from alcohol and substance abuse at higher rates than the general population. In the 2022 Profile of the Legal Profession, the American Bar Association (ABA) details that “nearly one in 10 judges (9.5%) reported problematic alcohol use in the past year; half the rate of lawyers overall who reported problematic drinking in a previous study (20.6%) and one-third the rate of young lawyers age 30 or less (32%).” Of all adults age 25 or older, 6.6% reported problematic alcohol use.²

In a 2021 article about alcohol use disorder, the ABA defines “alcoholism, or an alcohol use disorder, [as] a chronic and progressive disease [where] individuals may not be able to control how much they drink and frequently

continue to drink despite serious [social, career, and/or health] consequences.”³

Some of the symptoms to look for include:

- ▶ being unable to limit the amount of alcohol you drink;

- ▶ feeling a strong need or compulsion to drink;

- ▶ developing tolerance to alcohol so that you need increasing amounts to feel its effects;

- ▶ having legal problems or problems with relationships, employment or finances due to drinking;

- ▶ drinking alone or in secret;

- ▶ experiencing physical withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating and shaking, when you don’t drink;

- ▶ not remembering conversations or commitments, sometimes referred to as “blacking out;”

- ▶ losing interest in activities and hobbies that used to bring you pleasure;

- ▶ irritability when your usual drinking time nears, especially if alcohol is not available;

- ▶ keeping alcohol in unlikely places at home, at work or in your car; and

- ▶ gulping drinks, ordering doubles, becoming intoxicated intentionally to feel good, or drinking to feel “normal.”⁴

Unhealthy drinking habits such as these listed impair one’s health and lifestyle. Alcohol negatively affects “working memory, mental flexibility, attention, decision-making, problem-solving, processing speed, motivation, and planning abilities.”⁵ Alcohol use also can have devastating effects professionally, including a client suing you for malpractice, a disciplinary board complaint, or losing your license to practice.

Why do we normalize excessive drinking publicly, while struggling and recovering in silence?

The first step to addressing alcohol misuse is to recognize that there is a

problem. For far too long, some have been trying to maintain an image of a completely put-together, in-control, confident judge/lawyer/law student while hiding vulnerabilities, flaws and fears.

We can no longer prioritize success above well-being and ignore unhealthy coping practices. If you feel overworked and overwhelmed, it may be time to make some personal or professional changes.

You are not alone. Do not be afraid or ashamed to ask for help. You deserve to get help to live a healthy and productive life.

To learn more and seek confidential, non-disciplinary help with alcoholism, drug addiction, depression, burnout, or other impairments that pose serious health and ethical is-

sues, contact the professional clinical staff at JLAP at (985)778-0571, email jlap@louisianajlap.com, or visit the website at: www.louisianajlap.com. The call costs nothing but could make a huge difference.

Do not let this round be on you for JLAP is here to serve and support you. We are a CONFIDENTIAL Safe Haven of Healing.

If you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol, you also can access the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) at: <https://auditscreen.org/>.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Deaths from Excessive Alcohol Use in the United States," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/features/excessive-alcohol-deaths.html>.

2. "ABA Profile of the Legal Profession 2022,"

American Bar Association, 82, <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2022/07/profile-report-2022.pdf>.

3. "Alcohol Use Disorders," American Bar Association (Jan. 13, 2021), https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/alcohol_abuse_dependence/.

4. *Id.*

5. Patrick Krill, "What Do the Statistics about Lawyer Alcohol Use and Mental Health Problems Really Mean?" Fla. B. J., Jan. 2018, at 10, <https://www.floridabar.org/the-florida-bar-journal/what-do-the-statistics-about-lawyer-alcohol-use-and-mental-health-problems-really-mean/>.

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.

