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WSBA MEMBER WELLNESS PROGRAM PEER ADVISORS MANUAL

WASHINGTON STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION

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Member Wellness Program

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INTRODUCTION

Peer Advisor: a legal professional with knowledge and life experience who can offer support and guidance to benefit a legal professional facing challenges in their careers or personal lives. Peer advisors perform the functions and activities and are subject to the same confidentiality provisions as peer counselors in APR 19(b). WSBA uses the term advisors rather than counselors to avoid any confusion with licensed counselors.

PEER ADVISORS are a network of caring colleagues. Your experience provides expertise and perspective that helps craft a pathway forward for a legal professional who is dealing with a challenge. Perhaps you can even become a touchstone for wisdom and perspective throughout the Peer Advisee's legal career. You may be nourished by this connection as well.

A peer advisor can address a multitude of topics:

- ◆ Alcohol and substance use recovery, both AA and other models
- ◆ Mental health challenges
- ◆ Productivity struggles in one's practice
- ◆ Imposter syndrome
- ◆ Hostile work environments
- ◆ Career transition
- ◆ Difficulty balancing career and family life
- ◆ Retirement and more

JOINING A COMMUNITY

BY SIGNING UP to be a Peer Advisor, you are joining a community of WSBA members dedicated to helping other WSBA members in distress and making the practice of law healthier and more satisfying. WSBA's Member Wellness Program was founded in 1991 and is staffed by Dan Crystal, PsyD and Adely Ruiz, LSWAIC.

- ◆ Dan is a Clinical Psychologist who joined WSBA in 2008 after completing a fellowship at the Seattle VA where he specialized in addictions and PTSD.
- ◆ Adely is a Clinical Social Worker who previously worked at Sound Community Health before joining WSBA in 2023.

The Member Wellness Program provides clinical consultations, group counseling, writing on mental health topics, and presentations. For up-to-date information visit our website www.wsba.org/wellness.

- ◆ For clinical consultations we use a HIPAA protected telehealth portal: wsba.doxy.me. We provide brief counseling that is free of charge to members.
- ◆ Group counseling is provided through our Career Guidance Group, Healing Minds Group, and other groups that are available to law students, legal professionals from out of state, and even retired legal professionals.
- ◆ Articles are shared by email with the membership in our quarterly newsletter as well as writing for Bar News and NW Sidebar.
- ◆ Approximately 24 presentations are delivered annually to over 6000 legal professionals on a variety of mental health related topics to bar sections, county bar associations, minority bar associations, as well as WSBA productions such as Legal Lunchbox.

In becoming a Peer Advisor, you are joining a cause to help WSBA members in distress. We do not expect you to serve as a clinician—we can be your backstop for that. Some ways in which you may assist the WSBA Member Wellness program include:

- ◆ Attending our Peer Advisor training the first week of May during Wellbeing Week in Law.
- ◆ Writing articles about your experience for bar publications.
- ◆ Offering to speak about your own struggles as a legal professional for CLEs and other opportunities.

MEETING WITH A PEER ADVISEE

WSBA MEMBERS looking to meet with a Peer Advisor **complete a form** requesting a Peer Advisor with some specific details about what they are looking for. If they would like to consult before being introduced, we set up time to speak. We then choose a Peer Advisor that matches their request and inquire via email about their availability.

- ◆ We will send an email introduction to both Peer Advisor and Peer Advisee.
- ◆ Please don't wait for them to reply. **Reach out!** Set up a time to speak.
- ◆ Meeting in person or virtual are options you can discuss together. Meeting in person can lead to deeper connections.
- ◆ We hope you can meet with an Advisee **at least three times** and develop usefulness and chemistry. We share this guideline with advisees as well.
- ◆ **Please reach out!** Even if the meeting had an uncertain feeling, making the extra effort matters. Email them to see how they are and to offer your time. Try again if it has been a few months.
- ◆ Please circle back to tell us about the experience.
- ◆ Peer Advisor requests tend to happen sporadically, but rarely more than once a year. If you have not been contacted by us in a while, please reach out to either Dan or Adely or to wellness@wsba.org.

Be Creative! Finding areas of common interests will energize the connection you are forming. Some examples include:

- ◆ Inviting your Peer Advisee to a section meeting or CLE.
- ◆ Choosing a favorite restaurant or café to meet at.
- ◆ Walking them to a recovery meeting.
- ◆ Introducing them to colleagues and friends.
- ◆ Recommending therapists who have helped you or others.
- ◆ Recommending books they may find useful.

A PEER ADVISOR'S STANCE

ENGAGING WITH your Peer Advisee involves active listening and drawing on your personal experience. Active listening is a foundational piece of communication and should be the first step. Active listening occurs through a series of queries to help your Peer Advisee to explain more of their perspective.

Useful phases include:

- ◆ “Really, that must have been hard...”
- ◆ “Tell me more about that...”
- ◆ “What was it like to practice law while struggling with that?”
- ◆ “I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

More than anything, active listening is about getting out of your own way and giving your Peer Advisee your full attention.

Sharing one’s experience demonstrates vulnerability and authenticity. While this may be daunting as a Peer Advisor it allows for you to build rapport with your Peer Advisee. The rapport that follows can create an open-door policy that helps reduce stigma and shame.

Many of our Peer Advisors are part of the Unbar Alcoholics Anonymous group. The Member Wellness Program has helped to support and promote the Unbar for over two decades and highly recommends this community, but only if it works for the Peer Advisee. If not, we have other programs and ideas. If you are part of the AA community and your Peer Advisee is interested in receiving our support through AA, that’s great.

BOUNDARIES

THE PEER ADVISOR PROGRAM is part of the WSBA Member Wellness Program. Programs affiliated with the WSBA Member Wellness Program follow confidentiality guidelines stated under **APR 19b**. The purpose of maintaining confidentiality is to respect the privacy and the integrity of your peer advisee.

APR 19b (2) **Confidentiality.** *Confidential communications between a LAP client and staff **or peer counselors** of the Lawyers', LLLTs', or LPOs' Assistance Program shall be privileged against disclosure without the consent of the LAP client to the same extent and subject to the same conditions as confidential communications between a client and psychologist.*

- ◆ If you discover circumstances exist which could create confidentiality concerns under APR 19(b)(2) or implicate the Rules of Professional Conduct concerning confidentiality and conflicts of interest, please address it promptly. The goal is to identify circumstances under which it would be imprudent or unethical for you to either initiate or continue the peer advisor/advisee relationship. Under these circumstances we are happy to provide assistance or another referral.
- ◆ If your Peer Advisee is reporting suicidal or homicidal ideation, please promptly take all necessary and appropriate steps, including calling 911. After you have taken appropriate steps please inform us of this issue.

NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

PEER ADVISEES may have significant challenges in their lives. Some are in the throes of active addiction. Some struggle with suicidal thoughts. Others are feeling deeply demoralized about their work, the way they are being managed, dealing with debilitating anxiety, or life events like divorce, bankruptcy, or health problems.

We are your backstop! We can provide:

- ◆ Free and confidential clinical consultation to the Peer Advisee.
- ◆ The Unbar Attorney Alcoholics Anonymous group.
- ◆ Other addiction and mental health support groups.
- ◆ Referrals for inpatient, residential, intensive outpatient, or other treatment programs.
- ◆ Support for you as a Peer Advisor.

SIGNING UP

IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO, please complete our [sign-up form](#) to become a Peer Advisor. If you do not hear back from us, don't hesitate to reach out at wellness@wsba.org. We will schedule time to connect and learn more about your life experiences and interests that are bringing you to become a Peer Advisor.

Thank you for reading this manual and we welcome you to our community committed to wellbeing in the legal profession.

