MANAGING YOUR LEGAL CAREER 2012

Heidi Seligman, MA, LMHC
Lawyers Assistance Program

It Takes A Plan….

- A plan for managing daily work stress
- A plan for maintaining balance with work and life
- A vision for the career path you want to travel

Various Influences On New Attorney Well-Being

- Parenting challenges
- Relationship issues
- Work-life balance/self-care
- Issues with parents/son-in-law
- Finances
- Friendships and outside interests

Isolation
Questioning competency
Heavy caseloads
"drinking from the firehose"
Self-doubt
Lack of mentoring
Stress
No power
Lack of respect for the profession
Media exposure
Lack of workplace support
Few promotional opportunities
Procrastination
Colleagues: steep learning curve
Time management
Technology

Challenging job market
Safety concerns
Volatile economic conditions
Increasing pressure to understand other cultures and races
For Lawyers, Unaddressed Stress Can Translate to:

- Missed court appearances and deadlines
- Changes in behavior
- Decline in performance
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate
- Neglecting personal appearance
- Incoherent in court
- Inappropriate emotional outbursts in court
- Friction with judges or other lawyers out of proportion to the normal give and take of the legal process
- Higher risk for depression, substance abuse and other issues

ETHICS PROBLEMS!

STRESS=PERCEPTION OF THREAT

- Internal Appraisal of Danger/Discomfort
- Sympathetic Nervous System Response
  - (Fight, Flight, Freeze)
  - Increased Heart Rate
  - Increased Breathing Rate
  - Increase Adrenaline
  - Decreased Breathing Volume
  - Increased Muscle Tension
- Frequent Over-Stimulation Leads to Chronic Elevation
Cause and Effect

Causes ➔ Perceived Threat (plus Past Learning) ➔ Repeated Stress Reaction ➔ Effects

Our Perceptions Affect How We Cope with Daily Challenges

Event/Trigger ➔ (cognitive) Perception/Reaction ➔ FEEL

Perception/Reaction
Thoughts
Beliefs
Assumptions

Coping/Response
Physical
Emotional
Behavioral

STRESS: Know Your Signals - - Recognize YOUR Stress Response

- Physical
  - sleeplessness
  - appetite change
- Cognitive
  - memory
  - concentration
- Emotional
  - withdrawing
  - irritability
If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change....

STRATEGY:

1. Develop Awareness of Self-Talk:
   - Notice it
   - Write it down

2. Challenge the Belief or Thought:
   - Talk back to it/counter it
   - Come up with a practical solution

3. Ask Yourself:
   - Is it true?
   - What happens when you believe the thought?

Mindfulness as a Strategy

- Stop
  Bring Awareness to Negative Thinking:
  "I notice I'm having the thought that...."
  - Breathe: Inhale & Exhale
  - Reflect Nonjudgmentally
  On Your Appraisal of the Situation
  Is there another perspective?

- Choose
  Alternative Ways of Thinking / Acting
Self-Awareness Is Key

- Do you discover that you’re in a bad mood only after you’ve been stressed for a while? Some days it’s understandable!
- What calms you during the day? Going outside for lunch, or maybe taking a walk? Taking time to enjoy good weather? Lunch with colleagues? Closing your eyes for a few minutes to recharge?
- Recognizing your mood is half the problem.

Work Life Balance

**BALANCE IS ABOUT VALUES**

- What’s important to you and why.
- Where do you see yourself in 5–10–15 years.
- When you’re nearing retirement and looking back on your career what do you want to see?
- How will you feel thus far about the choices you’ve made.

- The place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.
  - Frederick Buechner
Can there really be Inner Peace for Busy People?

- *Inner Peace for Busy People*, Joan Borysenko, Ph.D.

Taking the job home?

- Are you distracted? Struggle paying attention?
- Quiet, crabby, or drained?
- Do others get it?

WORK-LIFE BALANCE Strategies

- Include non-work activities that allow for pleasure, creativity, contribution;
- Use schedule, create accountability if needed
- Cultivate both lawyer and non-lawyer relationships
  - Lawyer friends understand the pressures
  - Non-lawyer friends keep you grounded
Crafting a Vision…

Performance Goals vs. Learning Goals:
- Get more Class A Felony Clients (Sharpen my skills; Attend more CLEs in that area of Criminal Defense).
- Increase revenue (Improve bookkeeping skills; utilize new software).

Who might be able to help me?

WSBA Job Seeking Resources

- One on one consultations
- Weekly job seeker group
- Bi-Monthly job seeker group
  - Website:
    - Job Board
    - "Getting There: Your Guide to Career Success"

The Lawyers Assistance Program

- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Depression/Anxiety
- Balancing Work and Family
- Career Concerns, including Job Seeking
- Marital & Family
- Stress and Burnout
- Safety and Security
LAP Services

- Consultations, In-person and phone
- Third Party Assistance
- Referrals/Resources
- Groups
  - Weekly and Bi-Monthly Job Seekers
  - Mindful Lawyers
  - Coming: Solo Support group….