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# INSIDETRACK

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## Consider Wellness: Your Wellness – Whose Job Is It?

Who is responsible for your wellness? The stresses of working in the legal profession can take their toll. In this first installment of her column, Linda Albert, State Bar WisLAP program manager, talks about how to promote a higher level of health and well-being within yourself and within the culture of practicing law.

LINDA ALBERT

March 16, 2016 – I work with lawyers and judges for a living. They have taught me many things about the rewarding aspects of their work as well as the difficulties of maintaining health and wellness while working in the legal profession.

The latest [research study](#) published highlights the higher rates of depression, anxiety, and problematic drinking among U.S. attorneys, along with limited help-seeking behaviors. The rates are not good news for the profession, but the wealth of information our culture has for promoting health and wellness is promising. Most know the risks of smoking, and the rates of smoking have dropped significantly as the research on the risks and the costs to our society are well-known.

We can work to disseminate information, but equally important is the task of reconfiguring a culture of competitiveness, adversarial relationships, overworking, overdrinking, lack of funding, and lack of education on maintaining health and wellness.

How do you change a culture?

How do you change things you have no control over, like the required billable hours in your firm, the competitive environment at your law school, or the lack of funding as a government or private bar lawyer, or for court operations? This is hardly an exhaustive list of dynamics that over time erode the health of a legal professional.

Cultural change occurs when the people and the systems within the culture push for change in a consistent, systemic way. When each person, organization, or entity asks themselves “what can I (we) do to improve the health and well-being of the legal profession?” then we will have a start to change.

Whose Job Is It?

I believe the better question is: whose job isn't it?

It is everyone's job. Everyone who works with legal professionals has responsibility to positively impact the culture.

“ Cultural change occurs when the people and the systems within the culture push for change in a consistent, systemic way. ”



*Linda Albert is the program manager for the State Bar's Wisconsin Lawyer Assistance Program (WisLAP), which provides confidential assistance to help lawyers, judges, law students, and their families cope with problems related to the stress of practicing law.*

Live 1

But think about the question, “whose job is it?” In my household growing up, the first response might be, “I didn’t do it; it’s not my job.” It is interesting how we sometimes look to ascribe blame to find responsibility.

Let’s let go of the blame. Join forces to improve, protect, and preserve the health, integrity, respect, and viability of the legal profession.

The More Important Question Is: What Can I Do?

The most important question to ask is, “what can I do?”

Here is what lawyers and judges tell me:

Personally:

- Turn your email off when you leave the office
- Take a true vacation without taking work along
- Put your well-being in the equation of your life
- Seek help if you are struggling, and encourage others to do the same
- Make family and friendships a priority
- Ignore your inner critic
- Volunteer for something you believe in

Professionally:

- Rebalance your workload
- Seek out time with healthy colleagues
- Encourage those you mentor or supervise to do less, not more
- Delegate
- Focus on how you will do the workday in a way that maintains well-being
- Put boundaries in place to get in and out of the workday with clear definition

Societal:

- Write articles promoting change
- Serve on committees or boards that service/employ/educate legal professionals
- Lobby for change
- Get elected to promote change

So, consider wellness. [WisLAP](#) offers free confidential consultations on maintaining and improving health and wellness. For you, a colleague, or your organization contact us at (800) 543-2625. Health matters.

You Might Also Like ...

[Landmark Study: U.S. Lawyers Face Higher Rates of Problem Drinking and Mental Health Issues](#), *Wisconsin Lawyer*, February 2016.

[President’s Message: Let’s Look Out for Each Other](#), *Wisconsin Lawyer*, March 2016.

[What Makes Lawyers Happy?](#), *Wisconsin Lawyer*, July 2014.

[On Balance: 5 Strategies to Avoid Burnout](#), *Wisconsin Lawyer*, September 2013.