



WSSFC 2025

Quality of Life/Ethics Track – Session 4

Breaking the Silence: Mental Health & Addiction Across Generations

Presenters:

Joseph A. Bugni, Hurley Burish, S.C., Madison
Peter J. Carman, Law Office of Peter J. Carman, S.C., Appleton
Rachel T. Schromen, Schromen Law LLC, St. Paul, MN
April Toy, Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, Milwaukee

About the Presenters...

Joseph (Joe) A. Bugni is an attorney at Hurley Burish, focusing on trial and appellate litigation in both civil and criminal matters. In the thirteen years he spent with the Federal Defender's Office, in Milwaukee and as supervisor in charge of the Madison office, Joe handled over 600 federal cases and over sixty appeals. He has taken many cases to trial and received acquittals in a variety of different cases, including in a [closely followed](#) large white-collar conspiracy prosecution. In addition to his extensive trial experience, he has also been successful in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit with many appellate victories and two en banc arguments. Three of his Seventh Circuit briefs have been recognized as "the best briefs" by the State Bar of Wisconsin Appellate Practice Section. Articles about those briefs and the briefs themselves can be found here for the [2022 win](#), the [2020 win](#), and the [2016 win](#). After law school, Joe clerked for three years for then-Chief Judge William J. Zloch of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida and for two years for Judge Daniel. A. Manion of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

Peter J. Carman is a seasoned civil litigator and the founder of Peter J. Carman, S.C., a law firm based in Appleton, Wisconsin. With over 20 years of experience, Peter focuses his practice on representing injured individuals in personal injury and workers' compensation cases, bringing the strategic insight of a former insurance defense attorney to every matter he handles. Recognized for his integrity, precision, and dedication, Peter holds an AV Preeminent[®] rating from Martindale-Hubbell and has been named to Super Lawyers and *The Best Lawyers in America[®]* and is a Member of the Million Dollar and Multi-Million Dollar Advocates Forum. A graduate of UW–Madison (magna cum laude) and the Columbus School of Law, the Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C., he is known not only for his results in the courtroom but for his deep commitment to client care and community leadership. Peter is an active Kiwanis leader, a board member of the Fox Valley Rowing Club, and a long-time supporter of youth mock trial programs across Wisconsin. He has spoken on topics related to injury litigation and ethical lawyering.

Matt Shin is a psychotherapist and a formerly practicing attorney operating Sidebar Counseling LLC out of Wausau, Wisconsin. Leveraging his past legal experience working in a variety of practice areas and settings along with evidence-based approaches to fostering wellness and functioning, Matt provides counseling and consulting services to individuals, teams, and broader organizations. In his previous life, Matt operated a solo intellectual property practice, was in-house counsel at Mars Wrigley Confectionery, and practiced patent prosecution and IP litigation at Foley & Lardner. He obtained his J.D. from Washington University in Saint Louis and a Master's in Counseling from Northwestern University.

Rachel Schromen is Founder and Managing Attorney of Schromen Law, LLC, - an estate planning and elder law firm located in St. Paul, MN. Schromen Law has been voted Minnesota's Best Estate Law Firm in Minnesota by readers of the Star Tribune annually from 2021 – 2024, and in 2024 Schromen Law was named Minnesota's Best Law Firm. Apart from her law practice, Rachel is a trained end-of-life doula, hospice volunteer and enjoys exploring the Twin Cities with her dogs Murray and Margo!

As a trial attorney, **April Toy** represents businesses, insurance companies, and individuals in a wide range of civil litigation matters in state and federal courts. Her primary practice areas include commercial litigation, legal malpractice defense, and insurance coverage. She takes pride in developing case assessments early to navigate litigation costs effectively. Over the course of April's career, she has successfully tried several cases to a jury verdict and always brings a tireless work ethic and a diverse perspective to her practice. April was recently elected as National Secretary for the Hispanic National Bar Association. She is also the Vice Chair of the National Leadership Council for the Hispanic Alliance of Career Enhancement. She is active within the State Bar of Wisconsin, serving as the Chair of the G. Lane Ware Leadership Sub-Committee in 2022-2023.

Breaking the Silence: Mental Health and Addiction Across Generations

Session Overview: This continuing legal education session features a panel of four practicing attorneys who will share their personal experiences with mental health challenges in the legal profession. The session will be moderated by a formerly practicing attorney who now works as a mental health therapist, providing both legal and clinical perspectives on the issues discussed.

Section 1: The Culture of Mental Health and Law

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how mental health issues are perceived within the legal profession
- Identify cultural barriers that may prevent attorneys from seeking help
- Recognize common mental health challenges experienced across generations of practicing lawyers

Content Coverage:

- Panelists' early impressions of mental health perceptions in legal practice
 - Exploration of professional culture's impact on mental health awareness and treatment
 - Discussion of generational perspectives on mental health challenges in the legal field
 - Common mental health issues prevalent among practicing attorneys
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Section 2: Recognizing Mental Health Problems

Learning Objectives:

- Learn to identify signs and symptoms of mental health challenges in legal practice
- Understand how professional demands can mask or exacerbate mental health issues
- Recognize personal warning signs within the context of legal careers

Content Coverage:

- Personal experiences with identifying anxiety disorders in legal practice
- Recognition of addiction issues within professional settings
- Understanding perfectionism as a mental health challenge for attorneys

- Discussion of other mental health challenges specific to legal careers
 - How professional roles can both reveal and conceal mental health issues
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Section 3: Taking the First Step Towards Getting Help for Mental Health Problems

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the process of preparing to seek mental health support
- Learn about barriers to taking initial steps toward treatment
- Identify resources and strategies for overcoming hesitation to seek help

Content Coverage:

- Individual experiences with recognizing the need for professional help
 - Preparation strategies for seeking mental health treatment
 - Overcoming professional and personal barriers to getting help
 - Decision-making processes involved in taking the first step toward treatment
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Section 4: The Realities of Treatment and Mental Health Support

Learning Objectives:

- Demystify the actual experience of receiving mental health treatment
- Understand different types of treatment and their practical applications
- Learn about realistic timelines and expectations for mental health treatment

Content Coverage:

- Personal experiences with rehabilitation programs for addiction
 - Day-to-day realities of engaging in mental health counseling
 - Timeline expectations: when progress becomes noticeable
 - What treatment strategies were helpful and unhelpful for each panelist
 - Practical aspects of integrating treatment into a legal career
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Section 5: Managing Practice While Healing

Learning Objectives:

- Learn practical strategies for maintaining legal practice during treatment
- Understand how to balance recovery needs with professional responsibilities
- Develop time management strategies for attorneys in treatment

Content Coverage:

- Strategies for maintaining legal practice while pursuing rehabilitation and recovery
 - Schedule management techniques balancing treatment time with client needs
 - Approaches to managing colleague expectations during recovery
 - Professional boundary setting during healing processes
 - Client care considerations during personal treatment periods
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Section 6: Life After and During Recovery

Learning Objectives:

- Understand long-term recovery strategies for legal professionals
- Learn sustainable practices for maintaining mental health in legal practice
- Develop ongoing protective strategies for mental health maintenance

Content Coverage:

- Behaviors and habits that support ongoing mental health in legal practice
 - Professional boundary setting for sustainable mental health
 - Protective strategies for maintaining recovery while practicing law
 - Long-term approaches to mental health maintenance in demanding careers
 - Reality of indefinite recovery maintenance for some individuals
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Section 7: Advice for Colleagues

Learning Objectives:

- Provide guidance for attorneys considering seeking mental health support
- Understand what colleagues need to hear when contemplating treatment
- Identify ways the legal community can better support attorney mental health

Content Coverage:

- Direct advice for colleagues contemplating seeking mental health support

- What panelists wished they had known or heard before taking their first steps
 - Essential messages for attorneys still hesitant to seek help
 - Recommendations for how the legal community can better support colleagues
 - Systemic changes needed to improve mental health support in the profession
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Section 8: Q&A and Resources

Learning Objectives:

- Access practical resources for mental health support
- Understand available resources
- Connect with ongoing support systems

Content Coverage:

- Interactive question and answer session with panelists
 - Wisconsin Ethics Hotline information and usage
 - Psychology Today and other professional resource platforms
 - Additional resources personally recommended by panelists based on their recovery experiences
 - Ongoing support and maintenance resources for legal professionals
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Session Format: Panel discussion with moderated sections

Target Audience: Practicing attorneys, legal professionals, law students

Estimated Duration: 80 minutes

2025 Wisconsin Solo & Small Firm Conference

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Panelists:

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Law Office of Peter J.
Carman, S.C.

Rachel Schromen, J.D.
Schromen Law

April Toy, J.D.
Hinshaw & Culbertson
LLP

Moderator:

Matt Shin, J.D., M.A.
Sidebar Counseling, LLC

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Resources

State Bar's Ethics Counsel

- (608) 229-2017 or (800) 254-9154
- Timothy Pierce (tpierce@wisbar.org)
- Sarah Peterson (speterson@wisbar.org)

Psychology Today

- www.psychologytoday.com

Books

- The Anxious Lawyer
- Dare to Lead
- We Can Do Hard Things
- The Happiness Lab

WisLAP

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