



**Getting Lost in Our Own Lives**

Brought to you by:  
NC Lawyer Assistance Program  
& LAP Foundation of NC, Inc.

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Our ideal employee can function without sleep while working a 120 hour week. And is, of course, highly family oriented.

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Let's be honest. We must understand the true reality and nature of the system within which we operate.

Do we as a profession really practice what we preach?

We give it lip service until we hit a critical point personally.



**Legal Profession and Self Care.**  
See the reality for what it is, in order to better navigate it.

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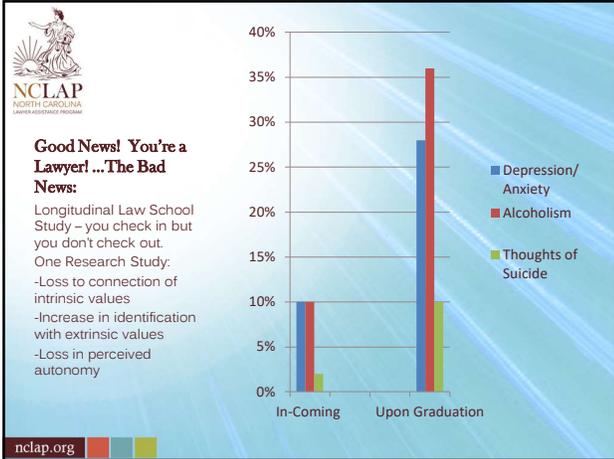
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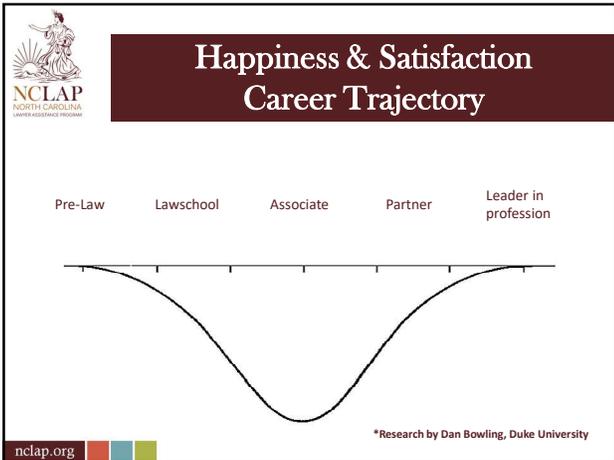
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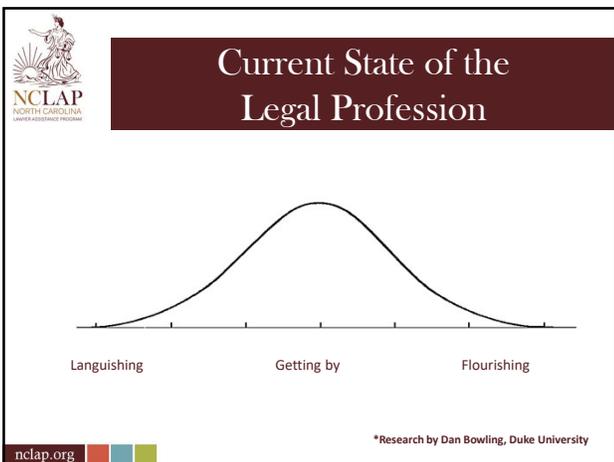
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## Landmark National ABA Study



- ABA, CoLAP and Hazelden Foundation partnered for the first national study on lawyer mental health.
- Large, reliable data set. Diverse in every way.
- Culled over 2,000 responses to retain only responses from currently employed attorneys.
- Findings published in the peer reviewed Journal of Addiction Medicine.
- And the results are in...

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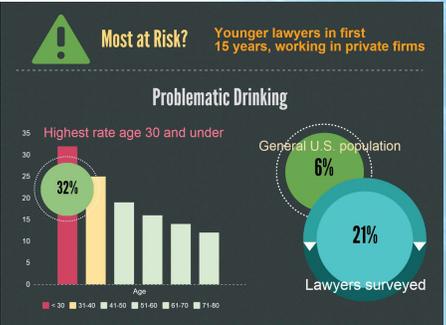


## Alcohol-Dependent Drinking

**Most at Risk?**

Younger lawyers in first 15 years, working in private firms

### Problematic Drinking



Age Group	Rate (%)
< 30	32%
31-40	~25%
41-50	~18%
51-60	~15%
61-70	~12%
71-80	~10%

General U.S. population: 6%

Lawyers surveyed: 21%

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## Problematic Drinking

- AUDIT-10 (consequences) revealed 21% at levels considered harmful or dependent,
- The AUDIT-3 revealed:

# 36%

Problematic drinking based on quantity and frequency alone.

\* Physicians came in at 15% using same screening measure.

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## Mental Health

### Mental Health Symptoms

Lawyers with alcohol use disorders also had highest rates of depression, anxiety, and stress.

**Depression**  
28%

**Anxiety**  
19%

**Stress**  
23%



Lawyers report depression 4X the general U.S. population

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## Translation...

- We know what the statistics are, but what does that “look like on the ground?”
  - There are very identifiable signs, both personally and professionally, that something is wrong, if we are paying attention.

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## Quick Look Signs - Personal

<h3>Relationship Problems</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints from clients</li> <li>• Problems with supervisors</li> <li>• Disagreements or inability to work with colleagues</li> <li>• Avoidance of others</li> <li>• Irritable, impatient</li> <li>• Angry outbursts, combative</li> <li>• Inconsistencies or discrepancies in describing events</li> <li>• Hostile attitude</li> <li>• Overreacts to criticism</li> <li>• Unpredictable, rapid mood swings</li> <li>• Non-responsive communication</li> </ul>	<h3>Personal Problems</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal separation or divorce; custody issues</li> <li>• No family support</li> <li>• Children won't speak to them</li> <li>• Living outside financial means</li> <li>• Credit problems, judgments, tax liens, bankruptcy</li> <li>• Frequent illnesses or odd accidents</li> <li>• Arrests</li> <li>• Isolating from friends, family</li> <li>• Avoids social activities</li> <li>• Personal life very intertwined with practice</li> <li>• Handling their own legal problems</li> <li>• Chaotic personal life/lots of drama</li> </ul>
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## Quick Look Signs - Professional

<h3>Attendance Problems</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrive late / leaving early</li> <li>• Taking "long lunches"</li> <li>• No return to work after lunch</li> <li>• Missing appointments</li> <li>• Unable to be located</li> <li>• Ill with vague ailments</li> <li>• Absent (especially Mon/Fri)</li> <li>• Frequent rest room breaks</li> <li>• Improbable excuses for absences</li> <li>• Last minute cancellations</li> <li>• Can't get a meeting with them</li> </ul>	<h3>Performance Problems</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed deadlines</li> <li>• Decreased efficiency</li> <li>• Decreased performance after lunch</li> <li>• Inadequate follow through</li> <li>• Lack of attention</li> <li>• Poor judgment</li> <li>• Inability to concentrate</li> <li>• General difficulty with recall</li> <li>• Blaming or making excuses for poor performance</li> <li>• Erratic work patterns</li> <li>• Non responsive</li> <li>• Failure to show up in court</li> </ul>
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## Additional Professional Cues

- So depressed can't open mail – mail piling up
- Inability to see big picture
- Refuse to stop working because they need the money
- Paralyzed in decision making
- Knows what needs to happen but can't make it happen
- Personality change – not the lawyer you used to know

Trust your gut. If you suspect something is wrong, it probably is.

These signs are huge red flags. Once the professional façade is cracked, ***it is the last domino to fall, not the first.***

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## Why & What to do?



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## Why & What to do?

- Why – lots of reasons...
- Two areas of focus:
  - False Self Syndrome – Loss of connection to and identification with true self
  - Limbic brain resilience can suffer from frontal cortex overload
    - Cannot be an all or nothing proposition

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## False Self Syndrome

- We all (meaning all people on the planet) have it to some degree.
  - The disconnection with true self if for no other reason than to fit in our society and culture
  - Need to meet expectations, to succeed
- In its basic form – being “out of touch” with ourselves and overly identifying with the roles we play.
  - Disconnection from feelings and authentic internal experience

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### **The Roles we Play - An Unspoken Agreement**

Mores are one explanation. Society defines roles, too. The young can have fun in certain ways, but adults are discouraged from engaging in similar activities. Or visa versa.

- We all play roles, and they constantly change. The role of employee or entrepreneur differs from boss and manager or from parent, spouse or child.
- Peoples' personas change, even if subtly, as they play their everyday roles; they change depending upon the interaction or scenario.

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**The Roles We Play**



Super Mom    Rescuer    Chairperson    Manager    Devoted Dad

Taxi Driver    Counselor    Referee

Cruise Director    Hero

Loving Spouse    Problem Solver

Volunteer    Go-to Guy/Gal

The Advocate

Stellar Employee    Committee member    The Comedian

Financial Provider    Dependable One    The Intellectual



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**Adding to that...False Self Syndrome**



- Legal profession adds new layers and dimensions
  - Zealous advocacy;
  - Always the helper;
  - Law busts boundaries;
  - Confidentiality;
  - Isolated-workload;
  - Tomorrow never comes;
  - Success.

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**Typical Attorney Workload**




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## Competitive Nature of Stress

SOMETIMES I FEEL THAT I HAVE THE WORST JOB IN THE WORLD!

YA...RIGHT?

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## False Self

- The profession of law greatly reinforces the false self syndrome and encourages disconnection from authentic experience.
- Lawyers are a self-select group already prone to this tendency.
- Can be a recipe for disaster.

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## Our Poor, Ignored Limbic Brain

**FRONT** Anterior Cingulate (motivation)  
FRONTAL LOBE (planning)  
Dorsolateral Prefrontal (executive & logical)  
Olfactory Bulb  
Lateral Orbitofrontal (appropriate social/emotional response)

**MOTOR**  
SENSORY

**BACK** PARIETAL LOBE (movement)  
OCCIPITAL LOBE (vision)  
TEMPORAL LOBE (language)  
CEREBELLUM (coordinate movement)  
BRAIN STEM (body basics)

**LIMBIC SYSTEM**  
Hypothalamus  
Amygdala (basic emotions)  
Entorhinal Cortex (memory)  
Hippocampus (memory)

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## Limbic Brain

- This is where emotional resilience resides.
- We must attend to it or ignore it at our peril.

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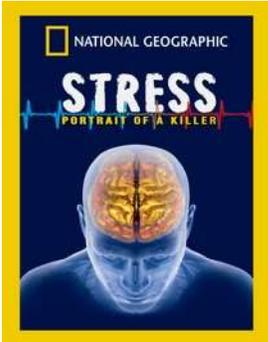
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## Stress: Portrait of a Killer

This movie sheds wonderful insight into the propagation of illness in today's society via the inner workings of the human stress response.

Only 50 minutes long.

Available on YouTube.



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## So, what is a lawyer to do?

- Critical to maintain, renew or begin extracurricular activities that nurture the limbic brain
  - Focus is on heartfelt joy and connection to self, others, and community
    - This does NOT mean volunteering for a bar committee to add something to your résumé. That is OK, it just does not count for this purpose.
    - Not superficial connections. These are OK, they just do not count for this purpose.
    - The guiding features: it brings you no outer recognition or benefit other than joy to your heart.
  - Example of tomorrow never comes

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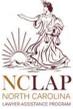
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## So, what is a lawyer to do?

- Practice good boundaries from the onset
  - Believe it or not, it is easier to start now than to try to turn it off later
    - We teach people how to treat us
    - Many lawyers think they do not have a choice – we always have a choice
  - Do something at the end of the day to affirmatively transition out of work into home life
  - Turn off the **smart stupid** phones
  - TAKE vacations; USE those vacation hours
  - Make good choices now that do not limit future options
    - i.e. buy a less expensive/smaller house
  - Take 3-day weekends when things are quiet
    - Realize many practice areas are feast or famine and work within that framework.

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## So, what is a lawyer to do?

- Activities that help us gain and maintain a broader perspective (beyond our jobs, beyond our false selves):
  - Some kind of mindfulness practice
    - Yoga, meditation, martial arts, etc.
  - Spiritual readings within your faith tradition
    - If you don't have a faith tradition, maybe explore it
  - A daily gratitude list
  - Regular exercise as part of a daily routine.
  - Finding ways to laugh and have real fun.

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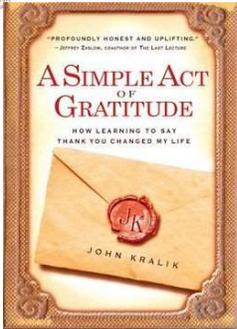
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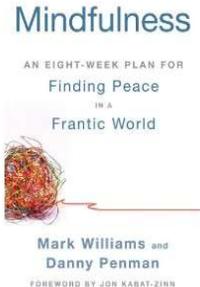
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## Some books on these topics...



**A SIMPLE ACT OF GRATITUDE**  
HOW LEARNING TO SAY THANK YOU CHANGED MY LIFE  
JOHN KRALIK



**Mindfulness**  
AN EIGHT-WEEK PLAN FOR Finding Peace IN A Frantic World  
Mark Williams and Danny Penman  
FOREWORD BY JON KABAT-ZINN

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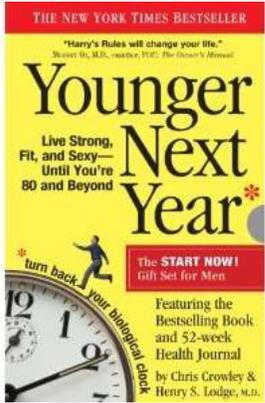
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### Regular Exercise Routine

- This book is written by a lawyer and his doctor and explains the evolutionary biology of aging. Most of what we call aging in this country is decay...
- This book explains in rather simple terms why exercise is so critical to our optimal functioning.



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### Alas...you will forget...we all do.



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### Future Practice Advisory...

- Doesn't imply weakness, just "human-ness"
- Is more about "dis-ease" than disease.



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So slow, is it even moving?



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That which is to give light must endure burning....



Victor Frankl

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Rather slow and insidious...  
then increases... then overwhelming....



Burning



Uncomfortable



Overwhelming

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**So what happens?**



**We crash.**

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**LAP: Safe, Confidential & Free**

- Services are FREE, paid for by your State Bar dues
- Completely confidential – Pursuant to Rule 1.6
  - Assist
  - Assess
  - Educate
  - Refer
  - Support

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**LAP: Safe, Confidential & Free**

- Issues we help with include:
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Career Counseling
  - Family Issues (including parent, spouse or child addiction - we can give you resources)
  - Alcoholism or Drug Addiction
  - Stress, Burnout, Compassion Fatigue
  - Trauma
  - Grief & Loss

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## Nurturing the Limbic Brain



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## Remember...

### mighty forces are at work



Not the least of which is ourselves and our drive for recognition, success, achievement and perfection...in many ways we each are the single biggest force we must each overcome.

We always have a choice. (movie clip)

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## But we always have a choice.



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## The Take Aways

- Conscious choice vs. unconscious reaction
- Keep fun things happening in your life
- Be willing to “pay the price” of shedding some false self trappings to find greater freedom and happiness

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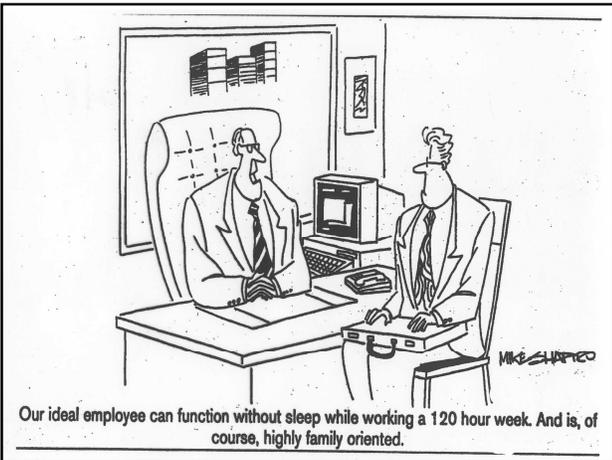
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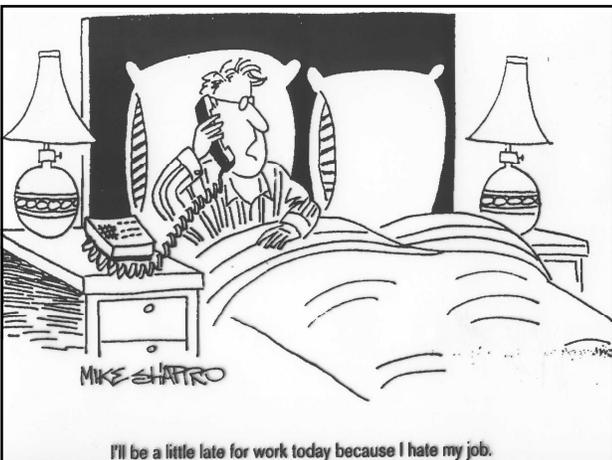
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**In the event you wind up there...**

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**Thank you!**

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