



NHLAP

NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Newsletter

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NH LCL Monthly Meeting

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers is a monthly meeting on the
SECOND TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH
of NH lawyers, judges and law students who come together for
free, confidential peer support for any issue that interferes with
professional competence. Absolutely confidential.

(No June meeting- Annual LCL Dinner instead)

July 9 at 6:00 p.m.

Airport Diner, 2280 Brown Ave, Manchester

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LAWYERS AND BURNOUT

Lawyers are prone to burnout because the practice of law is practically a working definition of risk factors attributable to burnout: strong identification with work as one's primary identification; high workload requiring consistent overtime; little or no control over work demands; and high expectations for performance in a helping profession. Sound familiar?

A clinical diagnosis of burnout does not yet exist. However, a growing understanding that burnout is a very real and debilitating condition. Many in the mental health community are pushing to have the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) adopt burnout as a diagnosable mental health disorder.

Burnout is a special type of work-related stress. It is a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity. Merriam-Webster defines burnout in two ways which makes it easy to understand:

Noun: Exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration.

Verb: To cause to fail, wear out or become exhausted especially from overwork or overuse.

Burnout is not something that happens overnight. It is more like the boiled frog: the frog that hops into cool waters and doesn't notice that the water temperature slowly and rises until the frog is living in boiling water. The practice of law can certainly feel like that. In the beginning, the work is challenging but manageable and fulfilling. Then the pace is faster, and the workload becomes. One day you are sitting at your desk wondering how you got to the point that you dread coming to work and when exactly it was that you lost all love of practicing law.

Symptoms of Burnout:

Fatigue Lack of energy to be consistently productive;

Cynicism Feeling that nothing you do really matters or is having any impact;

Sense of Inefficacy Exertion of significant effort with a feeling of no real progress or recognition;

Lack of Attention Trouble getting started and trouble staying focused on work;

Do you feel like you must drag yourself to work?

Are you irritable or impatient with clients, coworkers or support staff?

Are you using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel?

Are you having difficulty sleeping?

These feelings are all too common for practicing lawyers. They are the primary driving force behind those that chose to leave the profession for good. Not everyone has the luxury of changing careers in mid-stream. Mortgages, student loan debt, child support and a myriad of other financial obligations can keep one stuck where one is in a constant state of stress.

Although the emotional toll of burnout is what most know something about, the physical toll of burnout is very serious. Medical studies have linked burnout to coronary heart disease (CHD).

such as smoking, blood lipid levels and physical activity. This is likely due to the lower cortisol levels associated with burnout. Cortisol helps restrain the activation of the immune system and stress response. With chronic stress, the immune system is compromised leading to hyperactivity and inflammatory immune responses. This translates to a variety of chronic diseases cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer as well as CHD.

Research also indicates that the persistence of burnout over time arises from a vicious cycle in which its physiological affects feed back into the brain (proinflammatory cytokines) further contributing to exhaustion. English translation- the emotional response to burnout feeds the physical response which fuel the downward health spiral associated with burnout.

There needs to be a multidisciplinary approach to addressing burnout. It is not simply a matter of creating healthier coping skills in response to workplace stress. A successful response to burnout must also address the physical aspects of chronic inflammation, sleep disturbance, diabetes treatment and cardiovascular health.

Finally, there must be honest organizational assessment and implementation of corrective measures of the workplace to create a healthy atmosphere.

EMPLOYEE BURNOUT IS A PROBLEM WITH THE EMPLOYER, NOT THE EMPLOYEE.

The consequences of burnout costs US employers \$190 billion annually in medical costs, workers compensation claims, and lost productivity. It is much higher when factoring in turnover and absenteeism.

One way to address burnout is to survey employees to see what is causing undue stress. Use this data to come up with a concrete plan to identify problematic areas and work toward realistic solution. The fastest way to address burnout is to assure that workloads are in line with capabilities and resources.

Causes of Burnout:

Lack of Control

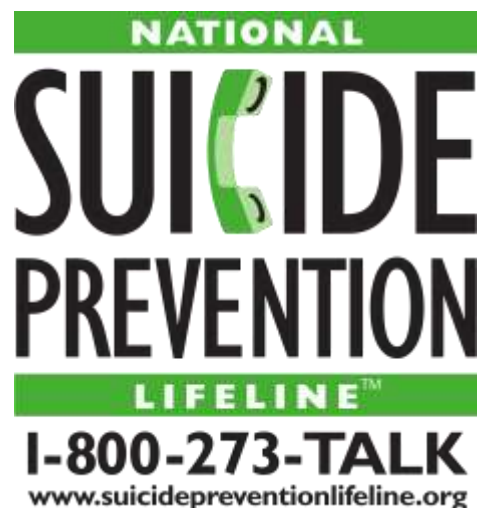
Unclear Expectations

Dysfunctional Workplace Dynamics

Lack of Social Support

Work-Life Imbalance

There are solutions available to address burnout. It does not have to be an inevitable consequence of a busy, practicing lawyer. Burnout doesn't need to develop into clinical depression, serious health problems, ethical missteps or general life misery. There is help. Don't wait until a problem becomes a crisis. NHLAP is here to help.



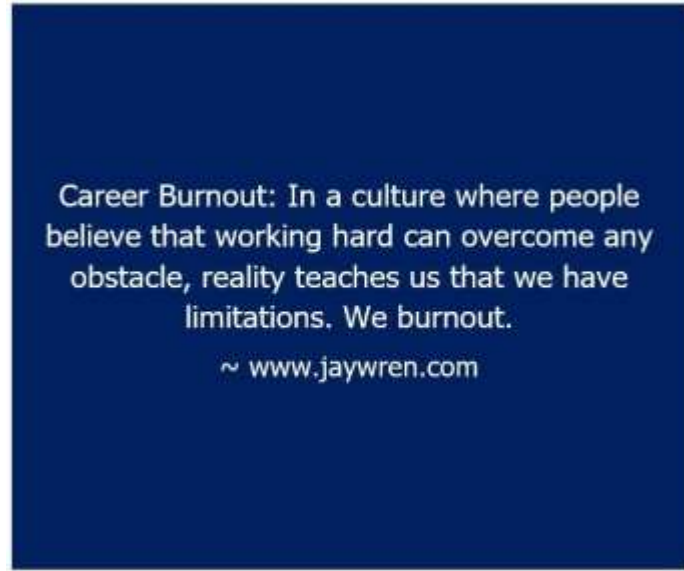
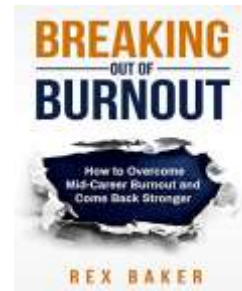
MONTHLY RESOURCE



SPOTLIGHT

BOOK PICK:

Breaking Out of Burnout: Overcoming Mid-Career Burnout and Coming Back Stronger by Rex Baker (2019) A practical guide to identifying the sources of your burnout, how to break free of burnout and how to avoid it in the future.



Free, Confidential, On-Line Peer Support

The Lawyers Depression Project (LDP), a group of attorneys who themselves suffer from depression, have launched a grassroots project aimed at addressing depression and other mental health issues in the legal profession. The group hosts a confidential forum at www.knowtime.com and weekly online peer-to-peer support group meetings, offering members the option of anonymity. To participate, members need only share emergency contact information with the group's founders (Joseph Milowic III & Aaron Kaufman, both attorneys who suffer from depression) to receive an anonymous knowtime email address for use with group meetings and to participate in the group's web forum. For more information, please contact Joe@knowtime.com

PODCAST PICK: Gen Y Lawyer: Understanding and Overcoming Procrastination, Burnoutlawyer.com and Anxiety. A discussion with lawyer turned psychotherapist Will Meyerhofer.



Available free through iTunes, Stitcher, or Google Play. www.genylawyer.com

WHAT IS NHLAP?

We are a confidential, independent 501(c)(3) non-profit to assist NH lawyers, judges and law students with any issue that may impact or impair the ability to practice law. Many lawyers think we only help with substance misuse. Although that is a very important part of NHLAP, it is not the sole focus of our work. We help with anything that has become problematic. Just some examples are depression, anxiety and other mental health issues; grief; cognitive limitations resulting from aging; eating disorders; professional dissatisfaction and burn-out; work-life imbalance and time management strategies.

We are here to help before consequences of these issues become problematic, public or both. We are not part of the NH court system nor the NH Bar. Because we are solely funded by a per attorney mandatory assessment, we are akin to an additional lawyer insurance policy- we can help individuals or legal employers understand the risks in ignoring these very real issues and point to concrete solutions.

We are your resource. We are here to help make your legal practice something you enjoy, not something you endure.

1-877-224-6060

QUICK TIP

BURNOUT LIFE HACK

Taking steps to improve energy levels and endurance can help avoid burnout. Taking short breaks periodically throughout the day can postpone the onset of fatigue. Planning enough sleep and eating small, healthy meals at regular intervals are the primary sources of energy that will sustain you throughout the day.

Scheduling time on a regular basis to spend with friends and family- with no discussion of work- boosts serotone (that feel good hormone) and fights burnout. Small preventative steps as a part of a professional routine can avoid a big problem with burnout down the road.

