

When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough

Perfectionism in the Legal Profession



Perfectionism in the Legal Profession – When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough

Presented by -Brian S. Quinn, Esq. – Education and Outreach Coordinator, LCL of PA

Brian S. Quinn, Esquire is a licensed attorney in Pennsylvania who currently serves as the Education and Outreach Coordinator for Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania, Inc., a Lawyers Assistance Program established in 1988 for the purpose of helping lawyers, judges and law students recover from alcoholism, drug addiction and mental health disorders.

Mr. Quinn obtained his undergraduate degree in 1970, his law degree in 1973 and a certificate in Drug and Alcohol counselling in 2012, from Villanova University. Prior to his work with Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, he was a private practitioner for over 40 years and has also worked in the field of alcohol and drug counseling in suburban Philadelphia.

Mr. Quinn is a past member of the Board of Directors of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania and served as a peer volunteer prior to accepting his current role as the organization's Educator in 2017. He has written and presented on lawyer wellness topics to law firms, Bar Associations and legal education providers for state, national and international groups as well.

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Co-Presented by Bryan Sgrignoli, Esq.

Bryan Sgrignoli is a Pennsylvania licensed attorney with nearly two decades of legal experience, primarily serving in in-house roles. For the last thirteen years of his legal career, Bryan led the development and implementation of comprehensive ethics and compliance programs, demonstrating a deep commitment to fostering integrity and accountability within organizations.

Bryan attended Bucknell University for his undergraduate studies, graduating in 1999, and earned his Juris Doctor from Rutgers Law School (Camden) in 2005. Before attending law school, he gained valuable experience as a Management Consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLC.

In 2024, Bryan embarked on a transformative career pivot by enrolling in La Salle University's Master's in Professional Clinical Counseling program. His intention is to become a licensed professional counselor, with a specific focus on supporting lawyers and other professionals in high-pressure careers.

Bryan's passions outside of work include cinema, photography, fitness, hiking, and spending time with his wife and two children in Media, Pennsylvania.

What Is A LAP ?

Our mission:

To provide a caring peer assistance program to save the lives and restore the health and professional competence of lawyers and judges, members of their families, and law students who are at risk as a result of alcohol and drug use, gambling, depression or other serious mental illness. We carry out this mission through a combination of confidential helpline services, volunteer support and education.

California Lawyer Assistance Program

- The State Bar's Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP) helps attorneys (active, inactive, or disbarred), State Bar applicants, and law students who are struggling with stress, anxiety, depression, substance use issues, or personal and career concerns.
- We strive to support legal professionals in achieving their optimum level of practice while enhancing public protection and helping to maintain the integrity of the profession.
- The program provides both voluntary confidential services and monitored services as needed.

About Confidentiality

We know that it is often difficult to reach out for help during the hard times, especially if it's about a private matter. Rest assured, we promise confidentiality—we release no information about your participation in the program without your knowledge or consent. Participation is confidential as mandated by Business and Professions Code section 6234.

Per Business & Professions Code section 6234, any information obtained by the LAP is confidential and cannot be disclosed as part of a civil proceeding, a *disciplinary proceeding*, or a public records request.

Call the
Lawyers
Assistance
Program
in YOUR State

Directory of Lawyers Assistance Programs by State

- https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/lap_programs_by_state.html

California State Bar Lawyers Assistance Program

- <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/ConsumerInformation/Lawyer-Assistance-Program-Pamphlet.pdf>

TOLL FREE:

877-LAP-4-HELP 877-527-4435 213-765-1190

LAP@calbar.ca.gov www.calbar.ca.gov/LAP

California State Bar Lawyers Assistance Program

LOCATIONS:

- **180 Howard Street San Francisco, CA 94105**
- 865 South Figueroa Street Los Angeles, CA 90017

RESOURCES:

- <https://calawyers.org/health-and-wellness/>
- <https://otherbar.org/> Confidential Peer Support
- https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/covid-19--mental-health-resources/

ABA / Hazelden- Betty Ford Study

(Published February, 2016 *Journal of Addiction Medicine*)

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale

- Depression – **28%** of all attorneys
- Stress – **23%** of all attorneys
- Anxiety – **19%** of all attorneys
- Higher rates among < 30 yrs. old



Mental Health By The Numbers

A recent survey of Global 200, Am Law 200 and NLJ 500 firms conducted by ALM Intelligence and Law.Com revealed:

- * **74%** feel the profession has had *a negative impact* on their mental health
 - 44% use alcohol to deal with *stress*
 - **67%** feel they suffer from *anxiety*
 - 35% feel they are *depressed*
 - 74% feel their *work environment* contributes negatively
 - **44%** reported isolation
 - **19%** have contemplated *suicide* at some point in their careers

Mental Health By The Numbers

- 36% use all of their vacation time
- 35% do not feel safe discussing their mental health at work
- 36% feel the billable hour has a *major* effect on stress level
- **62%** know a colleague who is *depressed* and
- **50%** know a colleague with an alcohol problem
- **72%** know a colleague who is stressed

Mental Health By The Numbers

- 65% feel they could NOT take an extended leave from employment to tend to mental health issues
- 78% felt it would hurt career trajectory
- 77% were fearful of what the firm would think
- 56% felt they had too much work to take an extended leave

What Is Perfectionism ?

Perfectionism, in psychology, is a broad personality trait characterized by a person's concern with striving for flawlessness and perfection and is accompanied by critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.





What Is Perfectionism ?

Those with perfectionism are often well accomplished.

How Common is Perfectionism ?

While the general population contains approximately 30% perfectionists, the percentage of perfectionists among the gifted population is close to 80%.

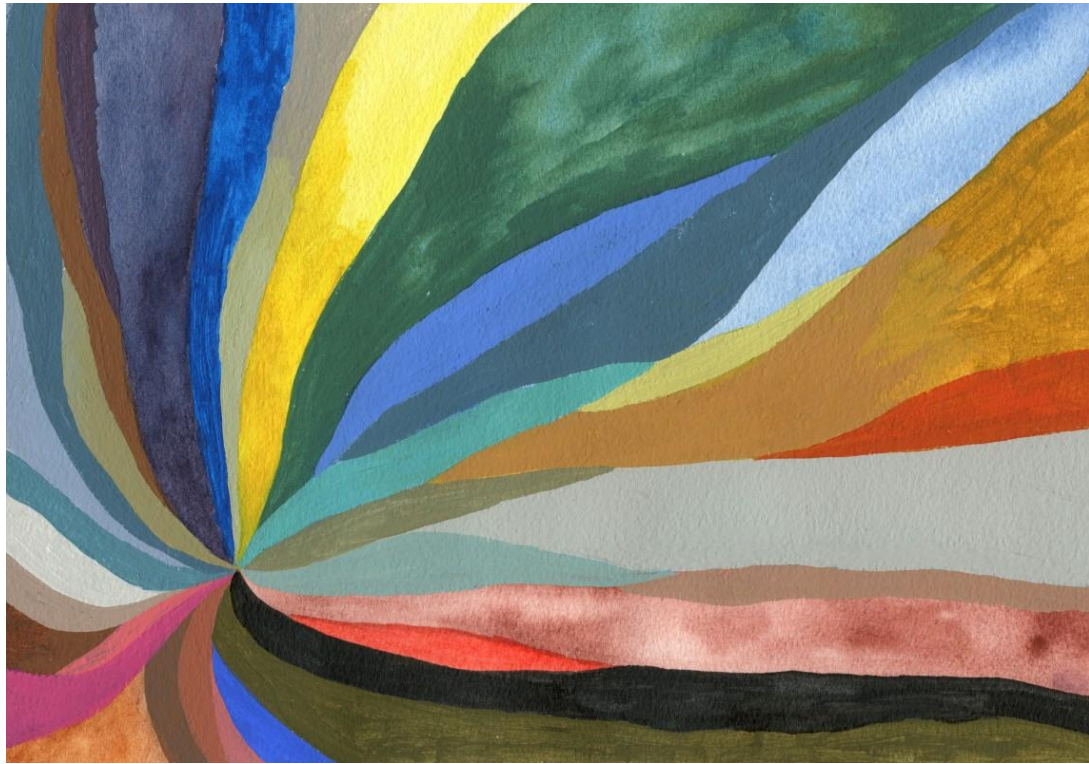


Perfectionism in the Workplace

Perfectionism is the most pervasive challenge holding leaders and workplaces back – and yet, no one is talking about it. In fact, 92 percent of people (yes – you read that number correctly) struggle with some form of perfectionism.



What Causes Perfectionism ?



- Anxiety
- Fear
- Genetics
- Age
- Environment

What Causes Perfectionism ?

Some believe perfectionism is driven by certain personality traits, such as fear, self –efficacy and childhood experiences.

Others believe it is our very culture that reinforces what is not a mental health condition as much as a *phenomenon created by societal expectations.*



Psychological Factors

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Atelophobia – fear of imperfection
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder





Environmental/Developmental Factors

- Social Media & Comparison
- Academic and Workplace Culture
- Parenting Styles
- Educational Pressure



Types of Perfectionism

- **Self-oriented** perfectionism is imposing an unrealistic desire to be perfect on oneself-
“When I am working on something, I cannot relax until it is perfect”
- **Other-oriented** perfectionism means imposing unrealistic standards of perfection on others-
“If I ask someone to do something, I expect it to be done flawlessly”
- **Socially-prescribed** perfectionism involves perceiving unrealistic expectations of perfection from others-
“The better I do, the better I am expected to do”

Do You Recognize Yourself ?

The "Classic " Perfectionist

The Superwoman/man

The Natural Genius

The Soloist

The Expert



Perfectionism



Perfectionism

Perfectionists set excessively high goals for themselves, and when they fail to reach a goal, they experience major self-doubt and worry about measuring up.



Adaptive Perfectionism

Perfectionism that is healthy and normal and relates to an intense effort that is put forth to achieve a certain goal. Adaptively perfectionistic individuals set high, but realistic standards, and don't resort to harsh self-criticism when these standards are not reached.



Maladaptive Perfectionism

- In contrast, *maladaptive* perfectionism can be characterized by perfectionism that gets in the way of leading a successful and happy life. A need to be in control of every aspect of one's life and environment.



Is Your Perfectionism Out of Control ?

- A history of always wanting to please others
- Criticizing others' behavior
- Procrastinating on important tasks
- All or nothing thinking
- Always needing to be in control of emotions
- Closing yourself off to others
- Taking everything personally
- Becoming defensive when criticized
- Feeling guilty and ashamed for perceived failures

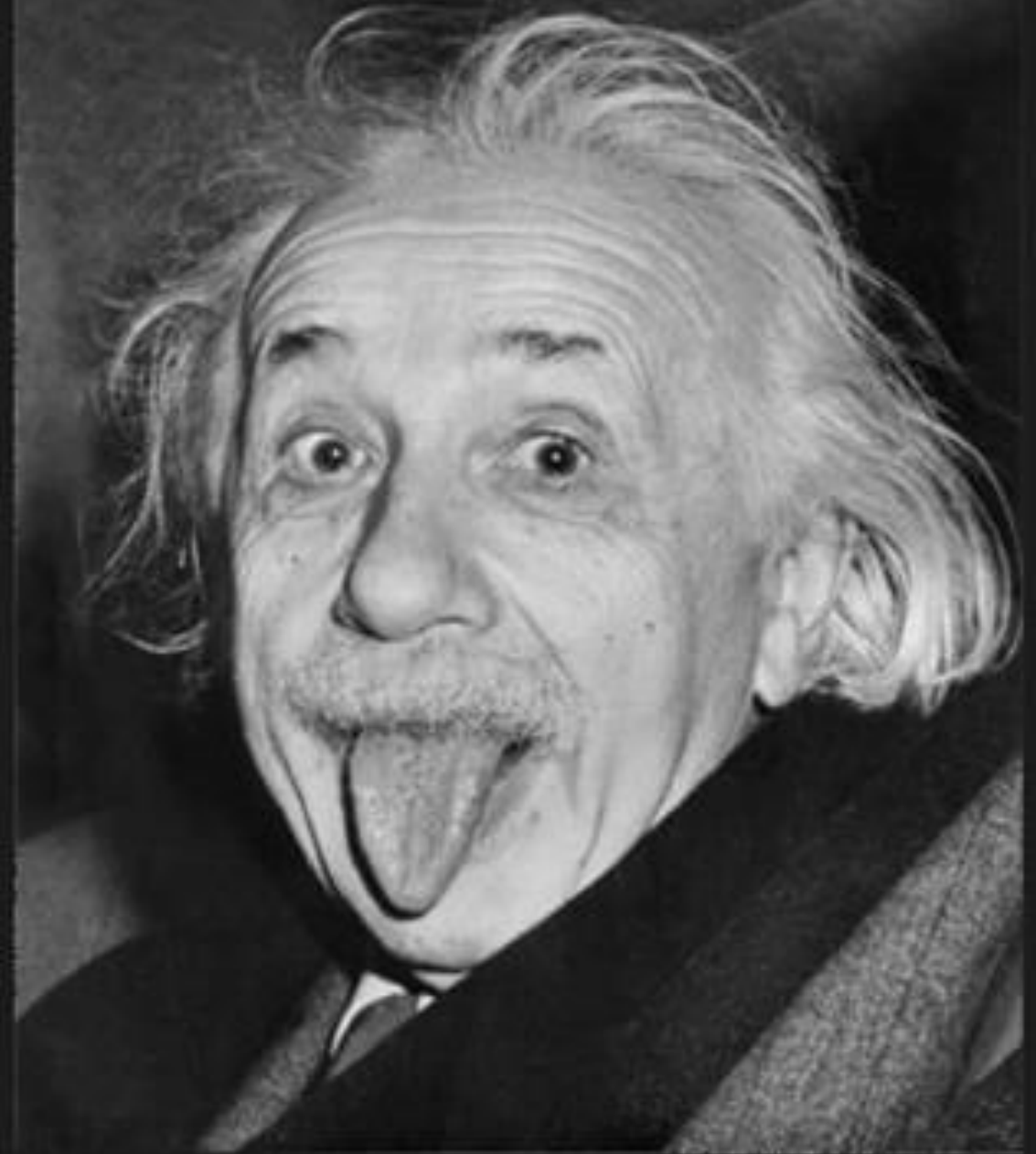
Superwoman/man

- Convinced you're a phony and everyone else is the "real deal" ?
- Push yourself to work harder to "measure up"?
- Are you the last to leave the office even after your work is completed ?
- Do you get stressed when not busy with work ?
- Have hobbies and passions been sacrificed to work ?



The Natural Genius

- The natural “genius” judges themselves by the ease and speed at which they accomplish a task.
- Were you a “straight A” student who excelled without much effort ?
- Do you reject the idea of a mentor ?
- Do you feel ashamed when faced with a setback ?



The Soloist



- Asking for help= phoniness
- Refuse assistance
- “I don’t need anyone’s help.”

The Expert



Do YOU Ever Feel Like This ?

1. I can trick people into thinking I know more than I do.
2. When I receive a compliment, I worry I won't live up to it.
3. I avoid having people critique or evaluate me.
4. Do you feel "pushed" by fear instead of "pulled" by desire?
5. I mostly remember my failures instead of my successes.
6. I rarely perform as well as I would like to.
7. Do you feel "almost perfect" is a failure?

Do YOU Ever Feel Like This ?

8. Are you so focused on goals that you can't enjoy the process?
9. If I'm not recognized as the "best", I feel inferior and depressed.
10. I worry about succeeding even though I'm told that I am
11. Are you so worried about imperfection that you procrastinate?
12. I feel those around me are more competent compared to me.
13. I rarely perform as well as I would like to.
14. Do you fear trying something new?
15. **Are you so rigid and self critical that you isolate?**

Social Isolation

Social isolation is the combination of solitude and loneliness, experienced by an individual for an extended period. Both the emotional and physical state feed off of one another and can create an inability to reengage with society in a meaningful way.



Stress or Distress ?

- Some stress is healthy. Positive stressors can energize and motivate lawyers to be productive and creative problem solvers.
- A totally stress-free life is not only unrealistic, it can actually be a harmful form of denial.
- We need to eliminate distress. Distress is harmful both physically and psychologically.



Stress or Distress ?

- Gradual, incremental increases in responsibilities, duties, pressures and demands at home and work combined with long workdays and weeks is risky.
- We stay busy and “stuff” our feelings.
- Even relaxing can cause us to feel distress.
- We become unaware that we have lost balance in our lives.



BURNOUT



WHAT IS BURNOUT ?

- ***Fatigue***, no matter how much someone rests or sleeps. An **exhaustion that runs deeper than sleep deprivation.**
- ***Cynicism*** about life or a feeling that **nothing a person does really matters.** Burned out people are generally **disengaged**
- A sense of ***inefficacy***. Burned out people feel like they are **exerting significant effort, but are not making any progress** or gaining any recognition.
- Burnout syndrome is **not a medically recognized condition**, thus there is no clear diagnosis or treatment.

WHAT IS BURNOUT ?

- Constant anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Changes in personality
- Irritability
- Pessimism
- Obsessive thoughts
- Feelings of inadequacy and dread



WHAT IS BURNOUT ?

- Sleep disturbances
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue
- Disengagement
- Depression
- Sense of helplessness
- Lost or diminished motivation
- Heart palpitations.



EFFECTS OF BURNOUT

- Less efficient
- Waste more time
- Self destructive tendencies
- Work quantity and quality declines
- Negative attitude towards those around you
- The feeling no one cares
- Unrelieved, may harden into a fixed element of your outlook
- Left unattended, can contribute to challenges to ethical duties, particularly communication and diligence

Why Lawyers ?

- Conflict driven and adversarial profession
- Emotional detachment
- Win-lose, often rigid thinking (black and white thinking)
- Perfectionism
- Excessive self-reliance

These traits are great for a successful career but not so great for mental health.



In other words...

Our personalities and our
Profession put us at high
risk.



So.....what are we going
to do ?





impossible

Set *REALISTIC*
Goals for Yourself

Set Realistic Goals



Focus on things you CAN control

Lawyers already have control issues. As long as we're focusing on questions with unknowable answers and circumstances outside of our personal control, this strategy will get us nowhere other than **drained, anxious and overwhelmed!**

“The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, **but to schedule your priorities.**”

- Stephen Covey



Prioritize your day

- Step back and look at your “to-do” list.
- How many are critical and **MUST** be done that day.
- What are you working to achieve ?
- Create a plan that will work toward your objective.
- THEN schedule your priorities
- DON'T have 10 things on your list – focus on 3 or 4 !



USE QUICK STRESS- BUSTERS

Pause – lean back- give your eyes a rest for a couple minutes.

Take three deep breaths and imagine your muscles relaxing from head to toe

Be mindful. Focus on the immediate present. Enjoy the moment.

Maintain a sense of humor about yourself.

Healthy routines are good- don't get trapped in a rut

Prioritize at work and home and manage your time effectively.

ASK FOR HELP. Talk it out with someone you trust.



SET BOUNDARIES

THE VIRTUAL WORLD

“Workers today are ‘never turned off.’ Like our mobile phones, we only go on standby at the end of the day as we crawl into bed, exhausted. Technology was supposed to liberate us from much daily slog...in 2002 fewer than 10% checked work email outside of work, today it is 50% often before we get out of bed...”

www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle2018/jan/15



Boundaries: Disconnect

- Turn off notifications.
- Do not charge your phone beside bed.
- Do not keep phone with you during meals, exercise, or social activities.
- Read a book or magazine rather than your phone or tablet.
- Get away from your PC to do some work, take healthy breaks from the screen, and don't take the laptop with you on weekends or vacations.





MORE QUICK STRESS BUSTERS

- Meditate and/or pray. **CONSISTENT** stress reduction occurs with only 10 minutes of daily meditation.
- Unplug from social media when acutely stressed.
- Exercise.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Cultivate a positive attitude.
- Sleep 8 hours/ night when possible.
- Avoid overuse of alcohol or prescription drugs. These short term “fixes” just mask the problem.

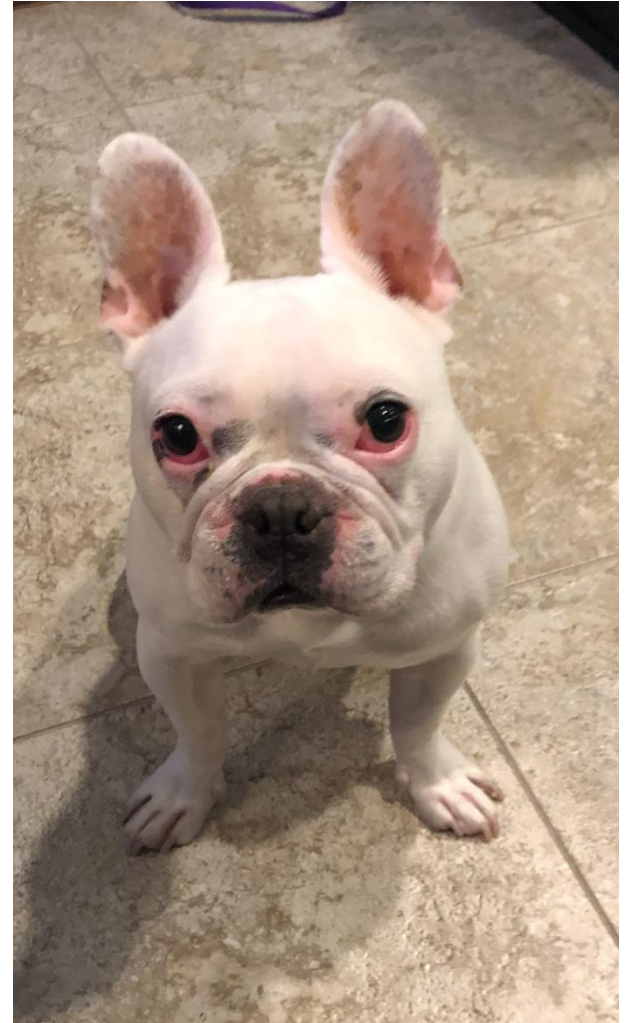
Meditation/Mindfulness

- Key to being truly present/not projecting
- Key to identifying our TRUE feelings
- Acknowledge feelings but don't attach (mountain/clouds)
- Breathing meditation
- Reduces "mental chatter"
- Helps eliminate the "what if's"
- Normal for us all to feel WAVES of emotion now



Gratitude

- Improves sleep
- We become more centered on others/humility
- Reduces depression
- Memorialize for reflection
- Gratitude journal
- Positive state of mind
- Directly correlated with Happiness and Peace
- Builds resiliency
- Boost productivity



Give Yourself a Chance for Success !

1. Don't isolate – break the silence
2. Separate feelings from fact
3. Accentuate the positive
4. Develop a healthy response to mistakes
5. Give yourself break- reward yourself !
6. Remember three letters – YET
7. “Surf the urge” to react
8. Build a strong support system
9. Look around
10. Fake it ‘til you make it



What keeps lawyers from seeking or accepting the help they so desperately need ??

- Shame and Embarrassment
- Stigma
- Denial
- Enabling



Dealing with *Denial*

- The most potent barrier
- Psychological defense mechanism
- Rationalize and minimize behavior
- Honestly believe they are under control
- I'm not one of "them" mentality





THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

- Lawyers are trained to deal with and solve problems. Thus, it is most difficult for the attorney to seek help since by doing so he feels he is admitting failure.
- Complicating this problem further is the tendency of the attorney's or judge's peers to indulge in a conspiracy of silence (enabling) and lighten the normal stresses of our profession.

What can YOU do ??



Although it is difficult, remember that your end goal is to help motivate the impaired lawyer or judge to seek professional help they so desperately need.

To Call LAP...or Not to Call

- I'm ok. I can work this out for myself.
- I want help but I don't want anyone to know.
- I already tried to get help and it didn't work.
- I don't have the money to pay for treatment.
- What will people say about me if I ask for help ?
- It's no use – nobody will understand – I give up !



To Call LAP...or Not to Call

- Is this really any of my business?
- I want to help but I don't want to get involved.
- Will I harm his/her or the firm's reputation?
- Must I report him or her to Discipline?
- I already tried to help and it didn't work.
- Let's wait and see. Maybe it will get better.
- I really don't have time for someone else's problems.



Brian's Big Five



- Express Gratitude for what you have
- Create 1 hour a day to think and relax
- Do one thing you love to do every day
- Set clear and realistic goals
- Let go of Fear

“When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough” - Perfectionism in the Legal Profession

Thank you all for attending today’s Continuing Legal Education program.

If you have any questions that were not answered or would like to contact me for any reason, please call or email me at the following:

Brian S. Quinn, Esq., Education and Outreach Coordinator

LAWYERS CONCERNED FOR LAWYERS of PA, INC.

(717) 460-3385

brian@lclpa.org

Call the Lawyers Assistance Program in YOUR State

Directory of Lawyers Assistance Programs by State

- https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/lap_programs_by_state.html

National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being Recommendations

**"The Path to Lawyer Well-Being:
Practical Recommendations For Positive Change"**

<http://lawyerwellbeing.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Lawyer-Wellbeing-Report.pdf>