



Well-being Toolkit for In-house Lawyers

Improve your work-life balance and leadership with practical strategies

Caution: This toolkit discusses topics that readers may view as traumatic, such as anxiety, depression, suicide, and other sensitive topics.



WHAT IN-HOUSE LAWYERS SAY ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT:

"This is an excellent resource for in-house counsel as they consider what actions they can take to increase their own well-being and support the well-being of their teams. If we take care of ourselves, we are in a much better position to meet the daily challenges of work and life with energy and clarity."

Jill Kalliomaa, Senior Legal Counsel, Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research

Thank you to ACC members

The ACC team warmly thanks the global group of ACC members and in-house counsel who shared insight for this toolkit compiled by ACC staff from the ACC Resource Library (the input from these ACC members was personal and not on behalf of their organizations):

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Practical Strategies to

STRENGTHEN

your work-life balance

Well-being issues impact workers and their organizations and are increasingly a focus for corporate leaders - for good reason. According to the latest Global Employee Life Evaluation by *Gallup*, 66 percent of workers felt they were struggling or suffering. As more employees continue to work remotely, organizations face ongoing challenges around workforce engagement and well-being.

This is a global crisis, significantly impacting the legal profession at a time when organizations are in critical need of the talents in-house legal professionals bring. The International Bar Association's Wellbeing Taskforce *reported* that "one in three lawyers around the world found their work to have a negative or extremely negative impact on their well-being." In this context, it is imperative that in-house professionals prioritize well-being. It is beneficial for you, as well as for the organizations you serve and the people you work with and care about.

This toolkit is intended to offer practical strategies for you to focus on and strengthen your own well-being and that of your team. A special thanks to the American Counseling Association (ACA) for their valuable input and to all the ACC members for their contributions. Your openness helps bring these essential topics into the spotlight and is the latest example of the in-house community supporting peers around the world.

As with all ACC toolkits, we intend to update and continuously improve this document in order to make it as useful and relevant as possible. Please share your suggestions and feedback at legalresources@acc.com.

Best regards,

Veta T. Richardson

PRESIDENT AND CEO
ASSOCIATION OF CORPORATE COUNSEL

What is your well-being?

For this toolkit, well-being means **how well a person feels in their mind, emotions, and body**. This includes feelings of **happiness vs. unhappiness**. It also includes your **positive vs. negative outlook on yourself, your relationships, and your personal and professional life**.

That said, there is no unique definition of “well-being.” Below are a few:

- “[The] state of being **healthy, happy, or prosperous**; physical, psychological, or moral welfare.” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
- “[A] state of **happiness and contentment**, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life.” (*American Psychological Association*).
- “Positive emotional well-being is when people manage emotions well and have a **sense of meaning, purpose, and supportive relationships**.” *There is a general agreement that* “well-being includes having **positive emotions** (e.g., contentment, happiness), not having negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), **satisfaction with life**, fulfillment, and positive functioning[.]” and **physical well-being** is viewed as critical to overall well-being. (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Focus on your well-being, support your balance and success.

- As an in-house lawyer, **you are likely to experience stress and crises**. You may feel **the effects** of the job on your work-life balance and well-being.
- **Expanding responsibilities and expectations from the business** have raised the profile and demands of the role. Chief Legal Officers are often part of the organization’s C-suite.
- **As the profile of the role increases, so does the pressure**. In-house lawyers often have tight budgets to address an increasingly complex business environment.
- **The demands of the role can take a toll on your well-being**. This may impact your job satisfaction, behavior, performance, client satisfaction, and career growth.
- **As a team leader**, your well-being and that of your team members are important. They affect **your leadership and your team’s effectiveness**.

We hope you will find the **strategies** in this toolkit useful to support your well-being and your success as an in-house lawyer. **We wish you well!**

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is for **all in-house lawyers**. It offers checklists with well-being tips relevant for various in-house levels and corporate contexts. This insight is relevant whether you are an experienced General Counsel, a mid-career in-house counsel, or a new in-house lawyer.

Where is this insight from?

The insight in this toolkit is mainly based on resources from the **ACC Resource Library** that the ACC team has reviewed and found relevant. It is also based on the input from experienced in-house professionals who are part of the ACC global community.

The Association of Corporate Counsel

- The Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) is a global bar association.
- ACC promotes the common professional and business interests of in-house counsel through information, education, networking opportunities, and advocacy initiatives.
- The ACC community includes more than 46,000 members from around the world.
- ACC supports your success as an in-house counsel, a General Counsel, or a Chief Legal Officer. ACC advocates for you to have a “Seat at the Table.” ACC provides value with resources for your team to succeed.
- Are you an in-house counsel? **Join us!** Learn, connect with peers, and boost your career.

Visit the ACC
Resource Library

Find articles, checklists, and
sample contracts and policies
for in-house lawyers.

Disclaimer: *The information in this toolkit (or in any linked resource) should not be construed as legal or medical advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts and should not be considered representative of the views of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) or any of its lawyers, unless so stated. None of the content in this toolkit (or in any linked resource) constitutes medical advice. This toolkit is not intended as a definitive statement on the subject, but rather to serve as a resource providing practical information to the reader. For legal advice, please reach out to a lawyer. For medical care, please reach out to a competent medical care provider.*

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From Peers: Why Your Well-being Matters

Each of us has a unique light to shine on our work and life. Making daily choices to incorporate things into our lives that are helpful to our physical and mental well-being **helps us be a healthier, more authentic version of ourselves.**

It's a lighter way of being, and while the stressors inherent to our work are not going to disappear, we can **be ready to meet any challenge that comes our way and respond as needed.**

Jill Kalliomaa

Senior Legal Counsel, Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research

Well-being is a critical aspect of leading a healthy, balanced, and productive life. Everyone can benefit from well-being practices but, **attorneys especially need to incorporate well-being** as they face increasing amounts of stress leading to increased physical and psychological issues.

It is often challenging for the in-house counsel to incorporate well-being practices as the legal profession is geared towards increased work production rather than focusing on one's own needs.

Unfortunately, the work stress and demand for productivity often leads to unhealthy practices such as substance abuse. **Thus, well-being should be first and foremost on every attorney's mind** as an alternative to the coping mechanisms historically used by attorneys.

Jeff Compangano

General Counsel and SVP, The Word & Brown Companies

Prioritizing mental health is not a sign of weakness but a proactive step towards overall well-being and professional success.

At age 45 and 20 years of practicing in-house, I experienced a stress-induced stroke and cancer. Something had to change. I found the resources needed and made better life choices that included many of the well-being assets outlined in this ACC publication. Be encouraged and **make life better for yourself and those you hold close.** You won't regret it!

James Patton

Chief Legal Officer & Vice President of Advancement, The Broadhurst Group



Improve Your In-house Life: Five Top Tips

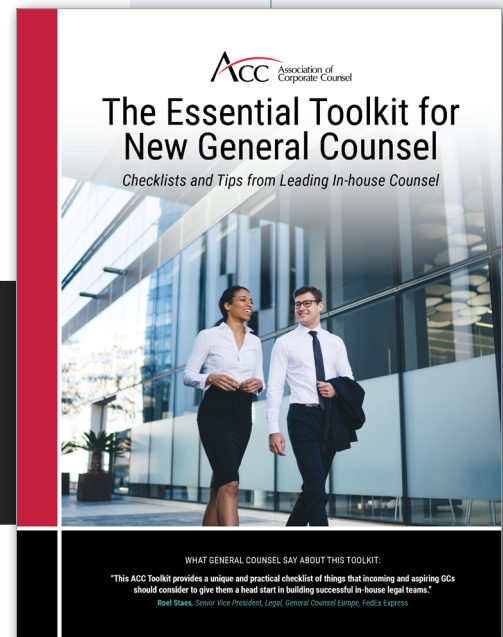
1. **Prioritize, manage your time, and delegate** as appropriate. These are key tools to support your well-being. Take time to understand what works for you.
2. **Be intentional** in your approach to well-being. Schedule time with loved ones and friends. Plan time to exercise, sleep, and recharge. Take regular short breaks during the day. Your nutrition matters too.
3. **Seek professional help** as needed. Especially if you are experiencing issues such as substance abuse, depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues.
4. **Build networks** that support your well-being and your ability to manage crises, adversity, setbacks, or perceived failures.
5. **Lead by example. Take time off. Encourage team members to take breaks and to use paid time off.** Limit off-hours emails. Share time-management and well-being tips and resources. Do you feel someone may need help or may have suicidal thoughts? Ask them a question and help them get help; you may save their life.

Are You a New General Counsel?

Tame the pressure and accelerate your success.
Show your value, build key business relationships,
 and lead your team.

Learn practical strategies in

***The Essential Toolkit for
 New General Counsel.***



WHAT GENERAL COUNSEL SAY ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT:

"This ACC Toolkit provides a unique and practical checklist of things that incoming and aspiring GCs should consider to give them a head start in building successful in-house legal teams."

Boel Staes, Senior Vice President, Legal, General Counsel Europe, FedEx Express

CHECKLIST 1

Boost Your Work-life Balance, Self-care, and Time Management

You may be productive for a short period when you are stressed, sick, or burned out. However, for a long and successful career, you need to maintain your well-being. Be intentional with your work-life balance, your time, and your priorities.

1. Plan for work-life balance:

- **Take time to regularly assess** your workload and stress levels.
- **Assess how you allocate time** between work and your personal activities.
- **Set clear boundaries** between work and personal life. Define times when you avoid checking email. Communicate these boundaries to set expectations. This may be particularly challenging for general counsel and chief legal officers.
- **Plan social time** with friends and loved ones. Try being 100% attentive during these times, disconnect your phone, and try not to think about work.
- **Plan “me-time”** to recharge, such as for sleep, walks, exercise, and hobbies.
- Be intentional with your **nutrition**.

2. Reach out for support:

- **Speak with a mentor** or trusted colleague on managing workload and stress.
- **Develop a support network** within the legal team (or within the broader organization if you're in a small legal team), to **share resources and strategies** to maintain balance. Connect with other in-house lawyers in the [ACC Networks](#).
- **Look for support** within your company, for example via employee resource groups and other departments. Also look for outside support, such as in a volunteer group, to pressure-test and get insights.
- **Don't be afraid to seek help and advice from a medical professional** (primary care, psychiatrist, therapist, etc.), especially if you have suicidal thoughts, experience high levels of anxiety, feel depressed, or if you are concerned about substance/alcohol abuse – see [Checklist 2](#).



Think about what **habits or actions** might be at play when you are at your best. It's OK — and healthy — to be curious about the **factors that have a positive or negative impact** on your mental health well-being.

Sean Hughes
General Counsel,
Vanguard Investments
Australia Ltd



3. Take time for self-care:

- **Set aside time for yourself.** When possible, schedule breaks throughout the day to recharge. This may feel impossible, but **even two or three minutes** of break can help. Take a break after you've worked on a major task or one that has absorbed your attention for a substantial period.
- **Move for at least a few minutes every hour** as you are able. This is in addition to **daily exercise**. Researchers found that *"those who sat for more than eight hours a day with no physical activity had a risk of dying similar to that posed by obesity and smoking"* (research mentioned by Edward R. Laskowski, M.D., in [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org)).
- **Develop a self-care routine** to give yourself a mental break and reduce stress. Include activities like exercise, meditation, or a hobby into your daily routine.
- **Identify what's important for you.** Don't keep pushing these activities aside for work. (*Whitnie Wiley*)
- **Turn screens off (computer, phone, TV) at least one hour before your bedtime.** *Light from screens disrupts your ability to fall asleep.* Leave phones and laptops out of your bedroom at night, if it is possible and safe to do so.

4. Manage your time:

- **Use calendar tools** to block off time for key tasks. This includes work tasks, and self-care items such as time to exercise. Prioritize them.
- **Don't stack** intense tasks back-to-back. Mix in easier-to-do tasks, to give your mind a chance to reset and maximize productivity and focus.
- **At the end of each day**, draft a to-do-list for the next day. Prioritize. Note the time you plan for each item. This should help you get the next day started.
- When you **prioritize task and projects, consider their expected impact.**
- **Before you start a new project:** "[Make] sure you first stop or finish two or three other projects." (*Amii Barnard-Bahn*)
- **Schedule short breaks between meetings.** A 25-minute (or 55-minute) meeting instead of a 30-minute (or 60-minute) meeting allows your brain to rest and refocus for **five minutes before the next meeting or task.**



Asking for help is not a burden to others; vulnerability is an act of courage that opens the door to deeper connections and mutual growth.

Spiwe Jefferson
General Counsel &
Chief of Staff,
Asset Marketing
Services, LLC



» This checklist is mainly based on insight from these resources:

→ *Positively Legal: Feeling Overwhelmed? 4 Ways to Get Back on Track*
by Caterina Cavallaro

→ *Lead the Way: Mastering the Balancing Act of Work-Life Balance*
by Whitnie Wiley

→ *The Juggle is Real; Work/Life Balance is a Myth*
by Jill Dinerman

→ *What Every Corporate Counsel Needs to Know About Project Management*
by Amii Barnard-Bahn

→ *What are the risks of sitting too much?*
by Edward R. Laskowski, M.D., mayoclinic.org



Block ‘*me-time*’ in your calendar to do activities you enjoy and make you feel well.

Tommaso La Barbera
Global Division
Senior Legal Counsel,
ABB



5. Manage your workload proactively:

- **Meet with your supervisor**, discuss workload concerns. Explore strategies for managing priorities.
- **Learn the needs and perspective of stakeholders** who seek your work. Then liaise with them to rebalance your workload or modify deadlines as needed.
- **Develop a delegation plan**. Identify what tasks you can delegate or outsource to free up time so you can focus more on high-priority projects.
- When people send you a request, **let them know when you plan to respond**.
- **Reevaluate** from time to time **how you manage your workload**.
- “Life is a series of seasons, and each season brings different challenges. For me, each season has required a slightly different juggle, a **rearrangement of priorities**, and a different sacrifice.” (*Jill Dinerman*)

Learn more

→ WATCH: *How to Navigate Stress and Overwhelm for In-house Lawyers - for Career Success*

→ *The sedentary office: an expert statement on the growing case for change towards better health and productivity*
by Buckley, J. P., A. Hedge, T. Yates, R. J. Copeland, M. Loosemore, M. Hamer, G. Bradley, and D. W. Dunstan.
Br. J. Sports Med. 2015;49:1357-1362
(found on SemanticScholar.org).



Working Remotely? Stay Balanced

Remote work can help staff juggle work and life responsibilities, such as parenting. It can also **blur the line between work and home life**. This can lead to **overwork** and **burnout**.

Maintain your work-life balance when working remotely:

1. **Maintain business hours.** Don't make exceptions to these hours unless you would also do so at the office.
2. **Limit your checking of work email or chats** outside of business hours. You may still need to be reached for emergencies.
3. **Schedule breaks.** Take time to step away from your desk, stretch, or engage in relaxation exercises. **Get out of the house if you can and take a walk.** Schedule periods of intense focused work with no distraction, followed by a break.
4. **Take regular vacations,** if possible away from home. Have **offline time**.
5. Prevent **virtual meeting fatigue**. Schedule and accept meeting invitations with care. Try to leave **break time between meetings**, even if it is just for a few minutes.



The first, and necessary step is **acceptance**. It only takes a moment of detachment and one thought: **“If I maintain this behavior for the next one, three, five years, how would my body react?”** Often, this little effort is enough to be impactful.

Caterina Cavallaro,
Managing Legal Counsel,
VGW
in *Positively Legal:
Feeling Overwhelmed?
4 Ways to Get Back
on Track*



Get tips from your in-house colleagues on remote work:

Connect with the

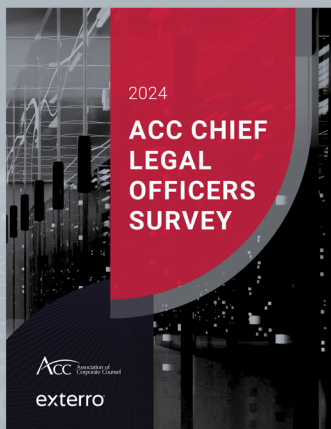
ACC Law Department Management Network



How CLOs View Their Work-life Balance

Five findings from the *ACC Chief Legal Officers Survey*:

1. **59%** of Chief Legal Officers say **their workload has increased** over the past year. Only **three percent** say their workload has **decreased**.
2. A majority of CLOs report being **happy with their work-life balance**.
3. Almost **one in five report being unhappy** with their work-life balance.
4. CLOs report **working an average of 52 hours per week**, with those in larger organizations working 55-hour weeks.
5. **10% of CLOs** report they **work 60 or more hours each week**.



Find out what keeps CLOs up at night

Read the findings from the latest ACC Chief Legal Officers Survey.



Is This Your First In-house Role?

Three Tips to Boost Your Transition

1. Boost your added value with tips from peers. Join the ACC [New to In-house Network](#).
2. Learn strategies from leading Chief Legal Officers at [ACC events](#).
3. Save time and resources with sample contracts, policies, and checklists from the [ACC Resource Library](#).

TAKE ACTION:

Write one or two steps to improve your self-care, work-life balance, or time allocation.

Describe	By what date?
1.	
2.	
Notes:	

CHECKLIST 2

Seek Help in Rough Times

Your situation may be such that you need external help. If so, don't wait, seek help now.

1. Recognize you may need help:

- **Many lawyers go through tough personal times** or face issues such as substance abuse, depression, or anxiety.
- **Such situations can impact a lawyer's well-being** and health and can endanger their life.
- **These issues may also affect the lawyer's work and conduct.** They may raise ethical concerns related to the lawyer's ability to competently serve clients.
- **It can be difficult to take a step to seek help, but it is an important one.**
 - It may feel humiliating, intimidating, or outright scary.
 - Some lawyers suffer for years before reaching out for help.
 - Fear of stigma can be strong.
 - However, **given the potential consequences of such issues,** it is important to **take a step to know available resources** and **seek help.**

» This checklist is mainly based on insight from these resources:

→ *Help in Rough Times: State Bar Lawyer Assistance Programs*
ACC Resource Library

→ *Feeling Overwhelmed? Lawyer Assistance Programs Can Help*
by James Patton

2. Know your resources:

- **Learn what resources are available** to support your well-being and mental health, such as counseling and therapy, support groups, and confidential helplines.
- **Consider services available through your health insurance** or through employee assistance programs that may be offered through your employer's benefits system.
- **Check if your bar association offers hotlines or channels for lawyers who seek help.** For example, *lawyer assistance programs* (LAP) in the United States, the *law societies' outreach or helpline services* in Australia and the United Kingdom, and other similar programs. Learn more on such resources via the [ACC Wellness page](#).

3. Reach out for help:

- **Don't stay alone.** If you face high stress levels, anxiety, or other mental health challenges, **seek help.**
- **The perspective of seeking help may feel difficult,** but it is important that you **take an appropriate step to seek the help you need.**
- **Talk to a medical doctor** about the stress, well-being, or mental health issues you face.
- **Contact your *bar's assistance program*** for confidential support (if such program is available in your jurisdiction).
- **If you feel you may benefit** from well-being or mental health support **but feel reluctant** to reach out to a doctor, a therapist, an LAP, or other relevant channel:
 - **Reach out to a trusted person** in your environment, such as a mentor, a relative, or a friend. Discuss how you are feeling. **Let the trusted person know you may need help,** or that you wonder if you do.
 - They cannot give you medical advice or replace a therapist, but **they may give you the nudge you need** to take a step to seek help from such professionals.

4. Utilize support groups:

- **Join support groups** or peer networks that may be available, such as through your bar association.
- **Consider connecting with fellow lawyers** who may face similar challenges – consider sharing about respective experiences and healthy coping strategies.

5. Explore counseling services:

- **Contact a licensed therapist,** ideally one who is familiar with working with your profession.
- **Use the professional mental health counseling services** that may be available through an appropriate channel such as your health insurance, your employee benefits system/employee assistance program (EAP), or the bar's lawyer assistance program.



Sometimes, **the hardest part is admitting** to yourself, and then to others who care about you, that **you are not coping** - at a certain time, in some circumstances.

Sean Hughes

General Counsel,
Vanguard Investments
Australia Ltd





Seeking help early on is crucial to prevent mental health issues from escalating. Corporate counsel should not hesitate to reach out to mental health professionals, lawyer or employee assistance programs, or support organizations specializing in attorney well-being.

James Patton
Chief Legal Officer &
Vice President of
Advancement,
The Broadhurst Group



**Learn
more**

- [Find a Helpline](#), a **free online tool** by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) to help people find helplines in over 50 countries.
- **For those in the United States** who are contemplating suicide or are in a life crisis, **dial 988 (toll-free, 24 hours)** now. You may also send a text to the **Crisis Text Line**: Text START to 741-741 to reach a volunteer crisis counselor.
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)[®] website (A.A. meetings take place in many countries).
- [Narcotics Anonymous](#) website (NA meetings take place in many countries).
- Links to [Lawyer Assistance Programs](#) (LAPs) in the United States, in the ACC Wellness page.
- [Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers](#) (LCL) For assistance, call: 651-646-5590 or 1-866-525-6466
- [Samaritans.org](#), a suicide prevention helpline (UK).
- [Mindful Business Charter](#) (UK).
- <https://www.lawcare.org.uk/>, a mental health charity for the legal sector in the UK.
- <https://www.lawcare.org.uk/how-we-help/fit-for-law/>, free online training for legal professionals on emotional competence and professional resilience.
- [Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Legal Profession](#), Law Council of Australia.
- A video testimonial: [The Besden Redemption](#), American Bar Association.

Find more links on the
[ACC Wellness page](#)

Help Others Seek Help

What if you feel a colleague or someone else may need help? Reach out to them. Ask them a question. You may save their life.



Quick Tips

1. **Ask** if they need help, and ask if they have suicidal thoughts.
2. **Take appropriate steps** to help them get help. **Stay with them** if it is safe for you to do so.
3. **Use relevant resources**, such as calling the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the US](#), or the adequate suicide prevention [helpline](#) for other countries.
4. **Look up mental health information and resources from the Ministry of Health** in your country regarding available mental health resources.
5. **Identify information from the national psychological, psychiatry, or mental health counseling professional associations** available in your country (for example in the US, from the [American Counseling Association](#)).
6. **Visit the [ACC Wellness page](#)** and find a curated selection of links to suicide-prevention and other mental health resources.

CHECKLIST 3



Most [US] state LAPs have **confidential reporting mechanisms** in place. **If you feel a colleague may need help**, you are probably not alone in that feeling. The LAP has experience in contacting attorneys who are confidentially referred to them.

Sherie Edwards
Vice President,
Corporate & Legal,
SVMIC



» This checklist is mainly based on insight from these resources:

→ [How to Save a Life](#)
by James Patton and Claudette W. Patton

→ Video: [Just Ask: How We Must Stop Minding Our Own Business in the Legal World](#)
by Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers
(**please note:** the content of this video may be traumatic and very difficult to watch)

→ [Suicide: What to do when someone is thinking about suicide](#)
Mayo Clinic website (US)

→ [How do I respond if someone says that they want to kill themselves?](#)
New South Wales Government website (Australia)

→ [Supporting someone with suicidal thoughts](#)
Samaritans.org (UK)

1. ASK A QUESTION. This is crucial. It can save the person's life.

- Reach out to the person. **Ask if they need help and ask if they have suicidal thoughts.**
- It's a misconception that asking someone if they have suicidal thoughts will push them to kill themselves (see the [Mayo Clinic's website](#)).
- **If you think someone may have suicidal thoughts**, use the [Question, Persuade, and Refer procedure \("QPR"\)](#) to find out if the person has such thoughts.
 - Many [Lawyer Assistance Programs](#) in the US include QPR as a tool to detect if someone is considering suicide.
 - [Learn more about QPR](#) from legal professionals James Patton and Claudette W. Patton.
- **Testimonials on the crucial importance of asking a question** are available in this video: [Just Ask: How We Must Stop Minding Our Own Business in the Legal World](#), by Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (**please note:** the content of this video may be traumatic and very difficult to watch).

2. If a person shares with you that they think they need help, take a step to help them get help (in a manner that is safe for you):

- **Encourage them to seek help.** Follow up with them as appropriate.
- **Connect them with relevant help** and resources as appropriate.
- **Consider making a referral** with your Lawyer Assistance Program, if such program exists.
- **See the sections below** on helping people with suicidal thoughts get help.

- 3. If the person shares with you that they have suicidal thoughts**, suicidal intent, or other thoughts of self-harm, or if you have other reasons to believe that the person has suicidal thoughts: **If it is safe for you to stay with the person, stay with them, *don't leave them alone***; and
- Either offer to accompany the person to the emergency room so they can get help, and go there with them until they are with relevant emergency personnel (if it is safe for you to do so); or
 - **Contact the relevant emergency services** yourself right away so the person gets the assistance they need, and **stay with the person (if it is safe for you to do so)** until competent personnel is taking care of the person.
 - In any event, **make sure that relevant emergency services are alerted** so they can promptly help the person in crisis. **Consider calling the relevant suicide crisis helpline: *call 988 in the US*, or *the relevant helpline for other countries*.**
- 4. Be mindful of confidentiality aspects.** In some countries, there may be concerns regarding whether information shared by or about a person in need of mental health support will remain confidential or whether it may be accessed or used by authorities, with potential implications for the person's personal life or career.



Find more links to helplines and mental health resources on the [ACC Wellness page](#)

Special thanks to the [American Counseling Association \(ACA\)](#) for the feedback that the ACA team provided regarding this checklist, and for their input regarding available mental health resources.

CHECKLIST 4

» This checklist is mainly based on insight from these resources:

- [Tips for Dealing with Adversity, Crises, and Failure](#)
an ACC checklist
- [How a Leader Keeps Calm in Crisis](#)
by Heather Childress
- [Leading Through Crisis](#)
by Whitnie Wiley
- [3 Well-being Tips to Stay Centered in a Crisis](#)
by Merridy Woodroffe
- [Secure Your Mask First, Then Help Others](#)
by Sherie L. Edwards

Overcome Adversity, Crises, and Failure

“Be resilient. Persevere through adversity.” It’s easier said than done. Learn tips from experienced in-house peers:

1. Maintain perspective:

- Remember: **Setbacks and challenges** are part of any career. That includes lawyers.
- **Careers are not linear.** There are easier times and difficult ones.
- Maintain a **positive outlook** and focus on solutions rather than dwell on problems.
- Evaluate the situation. **Accept the truth of the moment** and deal with it. If you fail to recognize that there is a crisis, it can make the situation worse.
- When you face a crisis, it may feel like the end of world. Take a moment to **regain perspective**. Remind yourself that the crisis will end at a point in time.

2. Build resilience:

- Develop **coping strategies** that help you bounce back from adversity.
- Practice **mindfulness**, positive self-talk, and adaptive problem-solving skills.
- **Ask yourself** what you can do to make a situation better.
- **Avoid impulsive reactions** when facing a stressful situation. Instead, **take a step back**. Sleep on a response or take deep breaths before reacting.

3. Seek help and build a support network:

- **Reach out to mentors or senior colleagues** for guidance and support in difficult times.
- **Connect with fellow ACC members** who may have gone through similar experiences.
- It helps to have a strong network of colleagues and friends. Develop **ACC connections**.
- **Can you talk to someone?** It may help to relieve anxiety and fears.
- You may benefit from their **wisdom and experience** to navigate challenges.

- **Build relationships** with coworkers, friends, and family when you are not facing a crisis. This can help you have trusted partners in place when you need support.
- **If you feel you may need professional help, seek the help you need**, for example to cope with substance abuse, stress, anxiety, depression, or other mental health conditions. *Also see tips in Checklist 2.*

4. Learn from failure:

- View what feels like a failure as an **opportunity to grow** and learn.
- **Reflect** on past experiences. Identify lessons learned and areas where you can improve.
- **Acknowledge** your negative feelings from the setback, but don't dwell on these.
- **Look forward. Create a plan** for how you will reach your goal. Keep the will to succeed.

5. Take care of yourself so you can take care of others:

- **Remember your latest flight?** Airline staff tell passengers that if an emergency requires the use of oxygen masks, they should **put their own mask on before helping others**.
- Similarly, as a team leader, *take care of your well-being so you can take care of others*.
- **Make space for self-care** to maintain the physical and emotional well-being you need so you can maintain your ability to handle the crisis.



In an era where speed matters, **slowing down** (even just for a second) can pay dividends.

Heather Childress
in *How a Leader Keeps Calm in Crisis*





Did You Lose Your In-house Job?

The loss of a job is often a **challenging experience**.

1. Find **tips for the first weeks and months**: [In-Transition Checklist: Steps to Take After Termination](#), by Krystal Saab, Sherie L. Edwards, and Brian P. Campbell
2. Learn **tips to stay positive**: View the ACC Webcast - [Career Corner: Maintain a Positive Mindset and Practice Self-care While Job Searching](#)
3. If you feel you **need help to cope** with the effects of the situation on your mental health or well-being, **seek the help you need today**. See [Checklist 2](#).

TAKE ACTION: Note your ideas to increase your ability to process failure, adversity, or crises.	
Describe	By what date?
1.	
2.	
Notes:	

Lead an Effective Team, Support Their Well-being

CHECKLIST 5

1. Promote work-life balance:

- **Encourage employees to set boundaries** between work and personal life.
- **Minimize off-hours communications** with your team. Avoid assigning work outside of business hours, whenever possible.
- **Ensure your team members take regular breaks, time off,** and offline time. Employees may worry about how taking leave will be viewed. Make sure they know that regular use of leave is **welcomed** and **expected**.
- **Model these behaviors** through your own work-life balance. Use time off. Team members take cues from their manager's conduct. **You can set the tone.** And **you will be a better manager** for your team if you are happy and refreshed.

2. Open communication channels:

- **Create a supportive environment** where team members feel comfortable to discuss their well-being and ask how to access resources. Facilitate this process, share your own well-being strategies, as appropriate.
- **Respect personal boundaries** when you discuss employee well-being. Discussion of personal topics might implicate discrimination and medical-privacy laws. Don't try to force employees to disclose private information. Don't make employees feel pressured to disclose such information.
- **Schedule regular check-ins** to stay in touch with your team members and address concerns or challenges they may face. Start such meetings with open-ended questions about how they feel and if they face any challenges. Check-ins are **especially important with a remote or hybrid workforce**. It is more difficult to notice potential issues when people don't meet in person.
- **Know that people have different communications styles.** When you run a meeting, know that some people are hesitant to speak in a group and may be those with the best ideas. Be aware of this. **Give each person a chance to speak** if they wish. **Let them know they may follow up after the meeting.**
- **Watch for signs** that team members may be near the point of fatigue, whether on the work or home front. Ask them if they need help and step in to help, as appropriate. Rebalance your team's workload if needed.
- Be open and available for **impromptu conversations**. It helps you know your team better. It also helps you learn if a team member struggles.

3. Provide resources and support:

- **Encourage your organization to offer access to resources** such as employee assistance programs (EAPs), mental health resources, and well-being initiatives.
- When needed, **advocate for flexible work arrangements or accommodation** for your team members.
- **Make sure your team is aware of health and well-being resources** that your organization offers. **Encourage team members to use these resources.**
- However, **don't ask team members whether they are using these resources**, as this could violate discrimination and privacy laws and regulations.

4. Recognize and appreciate:

- **Acknowledge the efforts and achievements** of team members, on a regular basis. This will foster a collective sense of accomplishment and raise the team's sense of purpose.
- **Express gratitude and appreciation** for their contributions to the team's success. This helps alleviate team members' sense of insecurity that may drive stress and low morale.

5. Encourage self-care:

- **Promote self-care practices.** Encourage team members to prioritize their well-being.
- **Model healthy behaviors.** Encourage and model the use of time-off for "**mental health days**," especially after highly stressful periods and projects.
- **Share tips and resources** on stress management and mental health support. Work with HR to obtain these resources. Get advice on how to share them with your team.

6. Foster social connection:

- Facilitate **team bonding and social interaction**, including in-person when possible.
- **Organize team activities**, lunches, virtual coffee breaks, or wellness challenges. Ask your group which team-building activities they would like to participate in.
- **Celebrate** team members' birthdays, work anniversaries, and other milestones. Make it team-specific and more special than the company's usual approach.

7. Provide clear expectations:

- Set **realistic goals and expectations** for projects and deadlines.
- Time pressures often increase due to the higher profile of the legal department and the need to “do more with less.” Understand your team’s time commitments. Have a realistic sense of how long projects will take.
- **Communicate your team’s workload limitations** to leadership. **Learn to say “no,” “later,” or “need more resources,”** when requests exceed your team’s capacity or compromise their ability to finish high-priority work. This can help senior leadership get a view of the organization’s capacity and develop strategic plans.
- **Communicate priorities** and provide support to help your team manage their workload effectively.
- Offer **training and tips on time management**.
- Seek **technology solutions** that help your team stay organized and on schedule. This may include collaboration and project management tools.

8. Offer professional development:

- Help your team members plan their **career paths and development**. Make it clear that their career goals are also your goals for them.
- Invest in **training and development opportunities** to strengthen and gain skills. Have members sit in with other groups from time to time, including outside Legal.
- **Encourage continuous learning**. Provide resources for professional development.

9. Take care of yourself as the manager:

- **Delegate work as appropriate.**
 - **You should not frequently perform your team’s frontline work alongside them.** This can lead to burnout and negatively impact your own responsibilities.
 - **If this happens regularly** and not just in emergencies, work with your team on prioritization, time management, or skills coaching.
 - **If there is more work than what your team can manage,** liaise with senior leadership to review staffing levels, if possible, and readjust priorities.
- **Lead with humility.**
 - Admit you don’t have all the answers. **Seek advice from your team members.**
 - They may understand tasks or subjects better than you do.
 - **Their creative input** is vital to your team’s success and your own.
 - As a bonus, they will also **feel more valued.**

» This checklist is mainly based on insight from these resources:

- **Top 5 Ways In-house Legal Teams Can do More with Less**
by Irene Liu and Megha Sharma
- **Positively Legal: More Tips on Using Travel and Nature to Support Your Well-being**
by Caterina Cavallaro
- **Positively Legal: Feeling Overwhelmed? 4 Ways to Get Back on Track**
by Caterina Cavallaro
- **The ABCs of Work: Rest**
by James Bellerjeau
- **Positively Legal: Balancing Head and Heart**
by Caterina Cavallaro
- **Positively Legal: Befriending Stress**
by Caterina Cavallaro
- Special thanks to **Jeff Compangano**, General Counsel & SVP of **The Word & Brown Companies**, for the insight he provided that served for section 11 of this checklist.

10. Seek feedback and adapt:

- **Solicit feedback** from team members about their needs and preferences for wellness support. Ask them what more you can do to support their well-being. Ask for their suggestions on whether the company's resources on this topic can be improved.
- Be ready to **adapt and adjust strategies** based on feedback and circumstances.
- **Advocate for your team** if changes are needed to promote their well-being.

11. Continue your own education as a manager:

- **Take courses on being a more effective leader and manager.** Organizations often offer these. If yours does not, look for a **course offered by ACC** or other outside providers.
- Know that **many effective lawyers have few skills or no training in managing people.**
- **Seek mentors.** These may be other leaders inside or outside of Legal.
- **Build relationships with go-to resources** on how to manage difficult or stressful situations. This can be as valuable as course-based education.

With such practices, leaders can support the mental health and well-being of their team members. As a leader, you can promote a more engaged, resilient, and productive workforce.

Learn more

- **A letter to the legal profession**, by The Mindful Business Charter
- **Raising the bar: Addressing the state of mental health in the legal sector**, by The Mindful Business Charter (a review of the last few decades of the state of mental health in the legal profession)
- **The Mindful Business Charter**, a resource intended to "remove unnecessary sources of stress and promote better mental health and wellbeing in the workplace."
- **Lawyer Well-Being – Research, Reports, and News on Well-Being in the Legal Profession**, well-being resources listed by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being.



Lead more focused team meetings

When you start team meetings, consider the **MERP approach** developed by Robert Calabrese, Principal of Business Visions Group and Master Facilitator for the [ACC NCR Leadership Academy](#).

1. **Invite attendees to take a minute in silence** to scan their own state. This is for them to:
 - **be mindful** of factors that influence their attention and presence; and
 - consider **what adjustments they can make** to be more present and engaged.
2. To this effect, **invite them to scan** in silence their own:
 - **Mental state:** How clear is their thinking now? Think of a weather analogy (clear, partly cloudy, very cloudy, foggy, stormy, etc.)
 - **Emotional state:** How do they feel? **Glad, mad, sad, afraid**, or a combination?
 - **Relational state:** Who else is on their mind? Can these thoughts be set aside to better focus on the discussion for this meeting?
 - **Physical state:** How do they feel physically? Energized, tired, suffering, other? And how does it impact their presence and focus in this meeting?
3. **The primary goal is not for participants to share these thoughts with the group**, but to be more mindful of their own state and to improve their ability to participate in the meeting.
 - **If the group is small (less than 10) and there is time**, participants **may also choose to share** their responses with one another. **This cultivates empathy, minimizes assumptions** about one another, and **enhances trust**.
 - **If the group is large or is short on time**, participants can just use this moment to increase personal mindfulness and participate in the meeting with more intention.

*Thanks to **Robert Calabrese**, Principal of Business Visions Group, who shared the MERP approach with attendees of the [ACC NCR Leadership Academy](#), a [leadership program for in-house lawyers](#), and gave permission to ACC to publish this description.*

Get tips from your in-house colleagues on remote work:

Connect with the
[ACC Law Department Management Network](#)

Build Your Support Network with Peers

» Boost your skills and network at the ACC Annual Meeting

- Enjoy the **largest annual gathering** of the global in-house community.
- Learn the latest **in-house strategies, tips, and trends**.
- **Bring your in-house team**. Get CLE/CPD credits.
- [Learn more](#)

» Gain leadership skills with the ACC network

- **Learn strategies from peer discussions** to manage a legal department.
- **Participate in a dedicated e-forum** to connect with peers and seek their insights.
- **Join the ACC Law Department Management Network!** ACC members only. Not an ACC member? [Join ACC](#).

» Become a more strategic Chief Legal Officer

- **Gain insight on what works, what doesn't, and what's coming next** for CLOs.
- Learn at the **ACC Chief Legal Officer Global Summit**. A **CLO/GC-only** global event.
- For CLOs/GCs serving in the **highest-ranking legal role** in their organization.
- [Learn more](#)

» Are you a Deputy GC? Take your career to the next level

- **Learn strategic decision-making** to better **shape the future of your organization**.
- The **ACC Executive Leadership Institute** is a master class for the next generation of GCs.
- **Industry leaders** share insights, strategies, and best practices with attendees.
- [Learn more](#)

» New to In-house? Strengthen your core skills at ACC CCU

- Learn **practical tips on core in-house topics** and **network to accelerate your success**.
- Attend the **vibrant ACC Corporate Counsel University** for recent in-house counsel.
- [Learn more](#)

» Learn to tackle the latest cybersecurity trends

- Learn about the **latest cyber threats and innovations** for in-house.
- Discuss **tips to prevent and respond** to data breaches.
- [Learn about ACC Foundation events](#). Sign up for the **Cybersecurity Summit**.

Find More Well-being Resources via the ACC Wellness Page

1. **Check out** a list of lawyer assistance programs and helplines in various regions.
2. Join the **ACC Wellness Community**.
3. To learn more visit the **ACC Wellness page**.

Be More Effective with 10 Insights and Checklists

1. **Positively Legal: The Art of Prioritizing What Matters Most**, by Caterina Cavallaro
2. **Say Yes to Well-being: How Daily Incremental Changes Can Transform our Lives**, by Olesja Cormney, Jill Kalliomaa, and Jeffrey Compangano
3. **Tips for Dealing with Adversity, Crises, and Failure**, an ACC checklist
4. **How a Leader Keeps Calm in Crisis**, by Heather Childress
5. **Leading Through Crisis**, by Whitnie Wiley
6. **The Halftime of Your Career**, by Rich Cohen
7. **Personal and Career Development Tips for In-house Counsel**, by Erin Berkowitz and Pam Entsminger
8. **In-Transition Checklist: Steps to Take After Termination**, by Krystal Saab, Sherie L. Edwards, and Brian P. Campbell
9. **The Juggle is Real; Work/Life Balance is a Myth**, by Jill Dinerman
10. **How to Save a Life**, by James Patton and Claudette W. Patton

Advance Your Career and Save Time

1. **Save time with the ACC Resource Library:**
 - Sample contracts and policies
 - Checklists and articles
 - ACC in-house survey reports
2. **Learn about trending topics in ACC Curated Collections:**
 - **Artificial Intelligence**
 - **Privacy and Cybersecurity**
 - **ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance)**
 - **Teaching Law School**
3. **Advance your career with ACC Career Corner:**
 - Find a supportive network of peers for career guidance
 - Elevate your career by finding a coach
 - Visit the **ACC Career Corner**
4. **Are you new to the in-house practice, or taking a new general counsel role?**
 - Learn strategies from experienced in-house lawyers.
 - Boost your impact as a new general counsel, with **The Essential Toolkit for New General Counsel**.
 - Accelerate your success as a new in-house counsel, with the ACC **New to In-house Resource Center**.