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Welcome, Kirsten!



The OAAP is pleased to announce that Kirsten Blume, JD, MA candidate, has joined the OAAP as an Attorney Counselor Associate!

Kirsten was born and raised in Eugene, Oregon. She earned her law degree from Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts. Kirsten is in the process of obtaining her Masters in Counseling from Oregon State University. Prior to joining the OAAP in 2022, Kirsten served those in need of legal service across the globe, including a fellowship in women's health human rights in Delhi, India, advocating to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva on the issue of homelessness in the U.S., working at a firm in Hawaii, clerking for Clackamas County Circuit Court in Oregon, engaging in Title IX and nondiscrimination investigations in higher education, and directing housing advocacy programs for nonprofits.

In addition to her professional accolades, she is a certified yoga instructor, avid runner and hiker, urban farmer, and parent to a young child.

Kirsten joins Kyra Hazilla, JD, LCSW, Director of the OAAP; Douglas S. Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I, Senior Attorney Counselor; and Bryan R. Welch, JD, CADC I, Attorney Counselor.

We Have a New Look!

You may have noticed that our newsletter has a little different look and feel. Last year, we revamped our website to streamline the content and make things easier to find. We took that opportunity to also refresh our logo and update the *inSight*. We're pleased to continue to bring you relevant information and resources to help you thrive personally and professionally — and we hope you'll take a tour at oaap.org and see what's new!



How Anxiety, Depression, Stress, Drinking Impact Lawyers

The following is Part I of a two-part inSight series reporting on the findings of a recent national study focusing on depression, anxiety, stress, and risky/hazardous drinking patterns among American lawyers, workplace factors predictive of these patterns, and gender disparities revealed by the findings. Part I will generally discuss the study's findings; Part II will discuss some of the lawyer well-being implications of the findings and present considerations and suggestions about ways to address those implications.

Stress, drink, leave: An examination of gender-specific risk factors for mental health problems and attrition among licensed attorneys (May 12, 2021) (“The Study”) is effectively a natural sequel to a 2016 study of American lawyers and the national, state, and local attention, concern, and recommendations generated by that study’s findings. The earlier study, “The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys,” revealed what for many was a generally recognized but seldom critically studied reality within the profession: American lawyers suffer from significantly elevated rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and substance misuse; 28% reported symptoms of depression; 19% reported unhealthy levels of anxiety; 23% reported

mild to severe stress; and nearly 21% reported problematic drinking.

The Study was conducted in collaboration with the California Lawyers Association and the District of Columbia Bar. Its findings were based on anonymous responses to surveys sent to randomly selected practicing lawyers within these organizations. Participating lawyers totaled 2,863. The surveys included completion of questionnaires asking about demographic and work-related variables, as well as the completion of professionally recognized mental health, substance use, and related assessments. The number of male and female participants was approximately equal. (Participants’ gender-election options appear to have been limited to the gender binary.)

The Study was conducted during COVID-19. It attempted in various ways to methodologically work around this reality, seeking to maximize the ultimate accuracy of its findings so they would be as minimally impacted by the pandemic as possible.

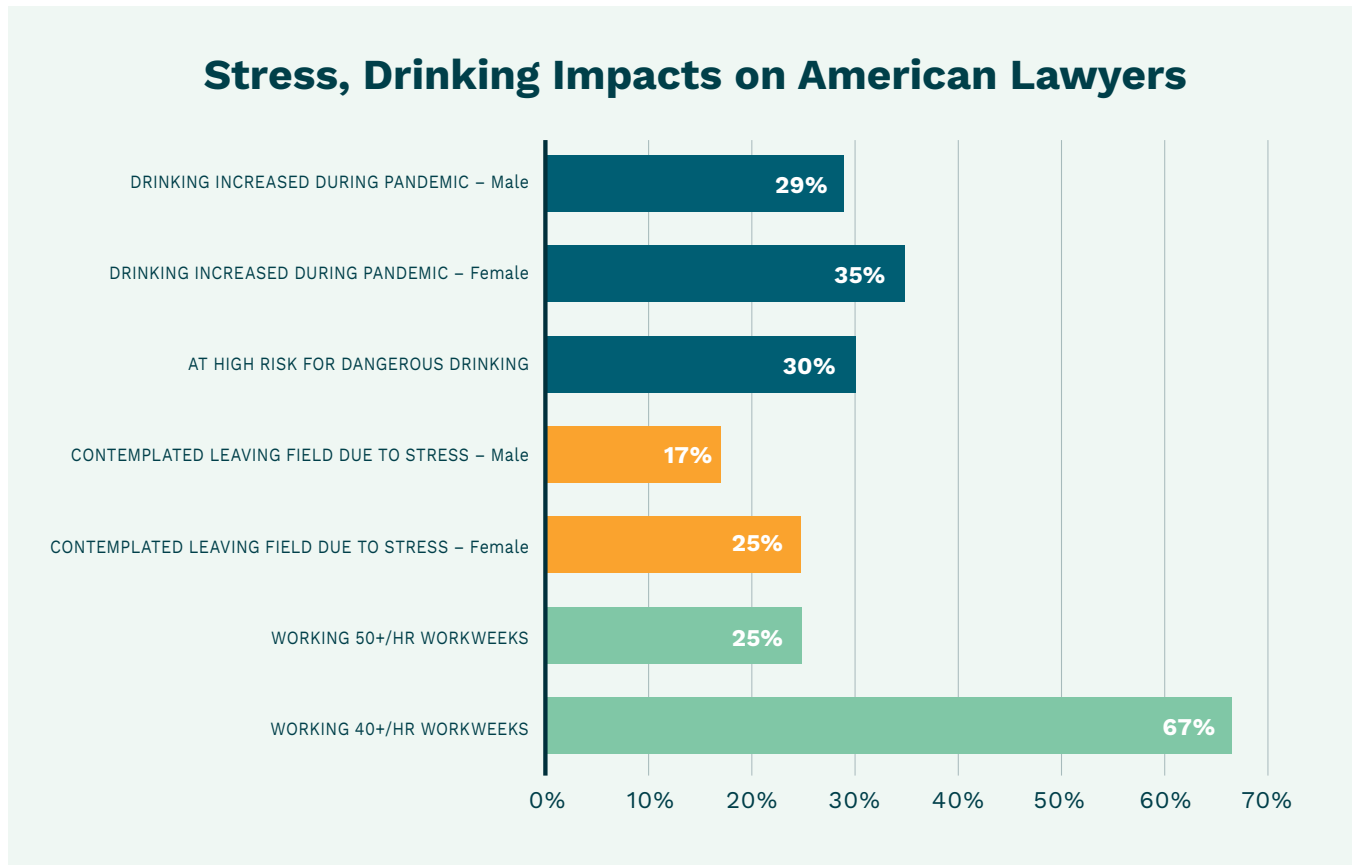
The Study’s goal was to examine the empirical evidence supporting “the nature, scope, and causes of the mental health and substance use challenges lawyers face, as well as the gender disparities associated with each.” (p.2) In particular, it sought to identify the following work-related factors considered predictive of these challenges:

1. Overcommitment to work
2. Imbalance between effort and reward
3. Work-family conflict

4. Workplace permissiveness toward alcohol
5. Prospects for career growth/promotion

The Study provides insight into some of the primary factors associated with depression, anxiety, stress, risky drinking, and attrition issues within the American legal profession. Among the more significant findings are the following:

- Approximately 67% of both male and female respondents reported working more than 40 hours per week on average, with nearly 25% working more than 51 hours per week on average.
- Women reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms, as well as higher levels of risky and hazardous alcohol use.
 - Depression symptoms were more common and generally more significant



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among female respondents, compared with their male counterparts.

- Anxiety symptoms were higher among female respondents, compared with men.
- Stress symptoms were higher among female respondents, compared with men.

Generally speaking, moderate and severe stress levels among men and women were, albeit with some gender variations, related to such reported workplace factors as effort/reward imbalances, work overcommitment, and promotion prospects; predictably, the more problematic the workplace, the more problematic the well-being outcomes of those in the workplace.

- Women reported higher levels of risky drinking. (Definition: for men, consuming more than 14 drinks/week or more than 4 during one occasion; for women, consuming more than 7 drinks/week or more than 3 during one occasion.)
- Women also reported higher levels of hazardous drinking. (Definition: for men, consuming more than 21 drinks/week; for women, consuming more than 14 drinks/week.)

- Nearly 25% of the responding women, compared with 17% of the men, reported they had contemplated leaving the legal profession due to mental health, stress, or burnout concerns.
- High work/family conflict was a strong predictor for contemplating leaving the profession; more so for women than for men.
 - High work overcommitment was also a strong predictor for contemplating leaving the profession; somewhat more so for men than women.
 - Perceived likelihood of promotion was associated with lower likelihood of leaving or contemplating leaving the profession for mental health among men; there was no similar relationship between these items for women.
- Approximately 30% of the participants screened positive for high-risk hazardous drinking, that is, reporting alcohol use considered to be within the range of alcohol abuse or dependence.
 - Despite the high prevalence of problematic drinking among study participants, only 2% reported ever having received an alcohol use disorder diagnosis.
 - A significantly greater proportion of women, compared with men, reported engaging in risky and high-risk/hazardous drinking.

Celebrating 40 Years!

Last year marked the 40th anniversary since the OAAP first began assisting the lawyers, judges, and law students of Oregon. We are proud of our home-grown heritage and deep roots serving the Oregon legal profession since 1982. We plan to commemorate the occasion with an open house later this year, inviting the legal community to drop by, see our space, and connect with colleagues. Stay tuned for updates in the next issue of *inSight*!

OAAP Recovery Support Meetings

The OAAP offers three weekly, confidential recovery support meetings for Oregon lawyers, judges, and law students who are interested in healing from problem substance use. Our recovery meetings have successfully served our Oregon legal community for 40 years. They provide a confidential, safe, friendly, and respectful environment for those seeking healthy and sustainable recovery from alcohol and other drugs, and are accessible via teleconference.

For questions about our meetings or other information, please contact OAAP Attorney Counselors Doug Querin at [DouglassQ@oaap.org](mailto:DouglasQ@oaap.org), 503.226.1057 ext. 12; or Bryan Welch at BryanW@oaap.org, 503.226.1057 ext. 19.

- Workplace permissiveness toward alcohol use and COVID-19 impact were identified as primary predictors of risky drinking among both men and women.
- Overcommitment to work was a predictor of risky drinking among men but not women.
- Of those surveyed, approximately 35% of the women and 29% of the men reported that their drinking increased during the pandemic.

The Study's findings provide valuable insights into some of the primary factors associated with well-recognized challenges for American lawyers: depression, anxiety, stress, risky and hazardous drinking, and attrition issues within our legal profession. In Part II of this *inSight* series, we will discuss some of the lawyer well-being implications of these findings and present considerations and suggestions about ways to address those implications.

– **DOUGLAS S. QUERIN, JD, LPC, CADC I**
Senior Attorney Counselor, OAAP



OTHER WORKS BY DOUG QUERIN AT OAAP.ORG

Thriving Today

Procrastination: A Story and Some Resources for Solutions (February 5, 2021)

Is the Juice Worth the Squeeze? (December 16, 2020)

Telling Time (September 15, 2020)

A Day in the Life (June 30, 2020)

The Best 12 Minutes of My Day (May 20, 2020)

THRIVING...Despite Challenge: A Brief Roadmap for Lawyers (May 26, 2020)

inSight

Money Talk: Fostering Effective Financial Conversations (June 2020)

Perspectives: Lawyers and Marijuana (March 2020) (co-authored with OAAP Attorney Counselor Bryan Welch)

Procrastination and the Allure of Tomorrow (June 2019)

Perspectives: Life in Early Recovery (June 2019)

Perspectives on Retirement (March 2019)

Helping a Colleague in Recovery (December 2018)

National Task Force Report on Lawyer Well-Being (March 2018)

Keys to a Successful Return to the Office: Accounting for the Emotional Toll of the Pandemic

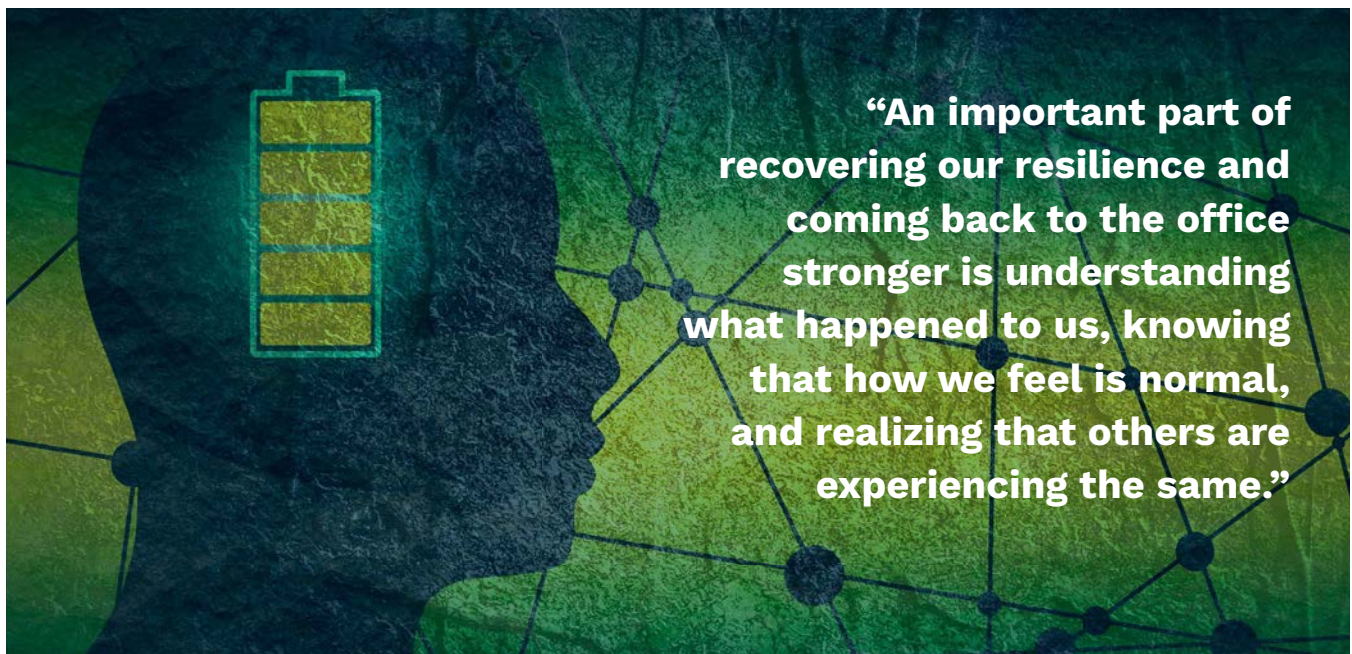
If your firm is contemplating how to gracefully and seamlessly bring your workforce back to the office, it's in good company. Bringing your team members back to the office as the pandemic winds down will be as novel of a process as sending them home. As surreal as working from home might have felt three years ago, many people have become accustomed to it. Oddly enough, returning to in-office operations may now feel both unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Each phase has presented uncertainties, and this phase is no different; once again, there are new issues to navigate and no playbook to follow.

The Role of Mental Health

In addition to exacerbating pre-existing mental health issues, the pandemic caused increased chronic stress, anxiety, depression and trauma,

research shows. Therefore, in addition to planning the logistics of a safe return to the office, also think about the impact of the past three years on your workforce's mental health. Considering the emotional toll and possible post-traumatic stress will enable your firm to make available new resources. Targeted resources will support all team members in their performance efficacy; they will also provide additional help for those who may be struggling to integrate yet another change.

When we have experienced trauma, it doesn't just "go away" when the traumatizing event is over. Some on your team may need specialized help to recover. Time will tell how the collective trauma impacts our families, workspaces, and communities, so the kinds of help needed will undoubtedly change over time.



Lawyers, Too?

If you are reading this and thinking, “Lawyers’ jobs are full of stress; shouldn’t they be prepared to deal with the additional stress of returning to the office?” No, is the likely answer.

The way lawyers think and our ability to separate ourselves from our emotions may make it more difficult for us to make a rapid recovery from setbacks. We may find it challenging to process difficult emotions, think optimistically about change, and work toward a rapid recovery plan. Most attorneys act as if we have it all together, thinking that something is wrong with us if we feel overwhelmed or confused. We believe we are alone in our experience. An important part of recovering our resilience and coming back to the office stronger is understanding what happened to us, knowing that how we feel is normal, and realizing that others are experiencing the same.

Surge Capacity

Surge capacity relates to an individual’s ability to adapt to survive a short-term, intensely stressful situation. For example, when the pandemic began, your surge capacity likely helped you to shift the way you socialize, work, connect with others, shop, and exercise. You may have felt capable of making changes because you felt energized for a short-term shift.

However, as it persisted, your surge capacity likely diminished. You may have felt fatigued by all the changes and lacked enthusiasm or patience for continued change over the long haul. As your surge capacity depleted, you may have pushed yourself emotionally and psychologically to modify your life. For most of us, our surge capacity was depleted after a few months of dealing with the intense stress. Now, after such a long haul, many of us may still be depleted and ill-prepared for the strain of returning to the office.

Over the course of the last three years, experiences of surge capacity have varied widely. For some, at the outset, they found isolation to be novel, turning their solitude into productivity—cleaning the basement, doing online exercise classes, connecting with loved ones and colleagues using videoconference. Over time, however, these makeshift ways of engaging in life and connecting with others became less interesting and even exhausting.

Others, such as those who were already experiencing chronic stress, teetering on the edge of burnout, or going through a personal crisis—went into emotional collapse at the beginning. Their surge capacity was already low, and the shock and stress pushed them into overload right away. Some of the attorneys who collapsed early on are still struggling; they are exhausted from trying to stay physically well, emotionally afloat, and financially stable. Their surge capacity may be at an all-time low, and they may feel put upon to have to return to the office and draw on nonexistent inner resources.

Some who collapsed at the outset may actually experience their surge capacity stronger now. The pandemic may have been an opportunity for them to focus their attention on their mental health and get the support they needed. Attorneys who had a positive mental health shift may currently be concerned about losing their new edge by returning to old unhealthy habits when they go back to the office. They may feel leery about an in-person setup, as they have adjusted well to a work-at-home routine.

Attorneys and staff who thrive on in-person connection may be eager to reengage in person, socialize with colleagues in the hallways, and see clients face to face. Other team members whose surge capacity for working at home diminished due to the challenges of making their home environment appear professional may also be relieved. These team members might have been overwhelmed by their dining room tables becoming desks or having to stay vigilant to the mute button to block out crying children or

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barking dogs. They may look forward to a clearer boundary between work and home, and not have the reminder of work in their living space.

Everything Is Not “Back to Normal”

As your workforce returns to the office, on the outside it may appear that little has changed. In-office operations may even look and run “normally” on the surface. But a lot may be going on under the surface. Be aware that no one went through the pandemic without experiencing additional stress. Many people’s nervous systems and mindset will not yet be recovered from three years of uncertainty, loss, and change. People will still be experiencing varying degrees of post-traumatic stress, and they may also have undergone a change in a life perspective that impacts their motivation to work the way they used to. Many lawyers’ and employees’ outlook on life, including their values, goals, and aspirations, have shifted.

Note that some attorneys will be experiencing decision-making fatigue and feel exhausted from navigating hundreds of micro-choices each day about staying safe from an invisible virus. These individuals may be overwhelmed by the thought of returning to work. This increased anxiety may impact their ability to focus on work and meet deadlines as they return to the office.

Additionally, most team members have conditioned themselves to stay physically distant from acquaintances and colleagues. By forming this new habit, their nervous systems likely developed an aversion to being physically close to those outside their “pods.”

The proximity of co-workers in office workspaces may feel unnaturally close and even threatening to your workforce’s nervous systems, even with additional space between workstations. This aversion to physical closeness may trigger neurobiological defenses

and cause team members to consciously or unconsciously withdraw both physically and socially at work. This impulse to withdraw may impact in-person collaboration and the fostering of workplace morale.

A Clear, Flexible Plan

A clear plan, flexible choices, robust resourcing, and resilience training are additional keys to a successful return to the office. Whether team members are excited or reticent about returning to the workspace, most people will have some amount of uncertainty. Many will wonder whether it is truly safe and what will be required of them. Feeling anxious about transitions is normal, especially when a person doesn’t have enough information about the transition plan.

1. COMMUNICATE THE PLAN

One tactic that quells anxiety about transitions is to communicate as much information as possible as soon as possible. Provide written material about the firm’s back-to-the-office plan. Lay out what will be the same and what will be different. List the things for which you don’t yet have answers and acknowledge the challenges being faced; identifying what isn’t yet decided but is in the works can also calm anxiety.

2. REASSURE AND APPRECIATE

Another approach that can quiet an anxious nervous system is reassurance and appreciation. When possible, reassure your workforce about job stability during the transition and share verbal and written appreciation for your workforce’s flexibility in adapting to so many changes. It’s all right for management to not know the answers to everything—remember there is no playbook for this.



3. GIVE FLEXIBLE OPTIONS

Giving your team members options can help calm agitated nervous systems. The pandemic left many people feeling like they are out of control, and as a result they may still be experiencing increased anxiety or depression, which, unmitigated, can impact work performance and client satisfaction. Offering team members choices is a practical way to help them recover and regain a sense of control over their lives.

Depending on your firm's specific circumstances, offer options such as a staggered return to the office or a hybrid setup such as half days or a partial week in office to help people slowly acclimate. Management may also want to consider offering the option for employees to continue to work at home; some people actually performed better at home.

4. DISCUSS EMPLOYEES CONCERNS

If you notice that certain team members are resisting returning to the office, speak to them directly about their concerns. Discuss firm resources, offer options, and ask them if they need additional help. Take into consideration that some people, especially those experiencing post-traumatic stress, may need to move more slowly back to the office than others.

5. OFFER RESOURCES

Offering firm-wide resources for mental and physical well-being is imperative to replenish team members' drained surge capacity and help them orient to a post-pandemic workplace. These include any program or materials that support your workforce to recover from stress and trauma, build resilience, and foster healthy coping skills. Offering programs geared toward well-being creates new ways for people to connect upon returning to the office.

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Creating a Surge Capacity Toolkit

Focus firm-wide training and CLEs on resilience education and on creating a surge capacity toolkit. Well-being resources and programming can be small things that don't have to cost a lot of money. The key to building resilience and rebuilding surge capacity is "mini-moments of well-being"—infusing small but consistent spurts of wellness throughout the workday.

Resilience training can be effective using a neuroscience lens, providing both the theory regarding our neurobiological response to stress along with simple, scientifically researched resilience tools that can be practiced in one-minute increments during the workday.

Short, simple practices help people refuel their surge capacity, build their resilience, and improve their cognitive functioning. In short, they feel better and lawyer better. Many find that the blending of scientific theory and short, targeted stress-reduction tools works well for our lawyer brains. Armed with theory and a simple resilience toolkit, lawyers who

are looking for support are quick to implement the skills and reap the rewards. If your firm offers resilience training that is tailored to lawyers and support staff as you ramp up back to the office or upon returning, it will help your workforce recover from the trauma of the pandemic and build lifelong skills that prevent burnout and increase productivity.



Upcoming CLE: Excellence, Perfectionism, and Well-Being

As lawyers, we want to be at our best – we want to perform at a high level while at the same time taking good care of ourselves and those around us. Often, though, it can feel like we must sacrifice our well-being to achieve excellence. For some, our relationship with “perfectionism” plays a part in that feeling.

Please join OAAP Attorney Counselor Bryan Welch and PLF Practice Management Attorney Monica Logan for a free webinar on Friday, April 21, 2023, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. as they discuss the relationship between excellence, perfectionism, and well-being. Bryan and Monica will explain techniques for finding an ideal work environment to enhance your wellness. They will also show how to create

healthy structures to support excellence both individually and organizationally. You will learn practical tips for arranging an optimal workflow in your practice while understanding how to manage your inner perfectionist, with the goal of achieving professional excellence and personal well-being.

This program has been approved for .5 Practical Skills and .5 Mental Health / Substance Use MCLE credits.

The registration deadline is 4:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 19, 2023. For more information or to register, visit oaap.org/events/ or call Jeanne at the OAAP: 503.226.1057.

Moving Through the Next Phase

As we move through this next phase of life, know that we are still navigating a lot of unknowns, and there are still many choices to be made. The pandemic may shift our legal culture from feeling uncomfortable talking about mental health to normalizing it as a necessary part of lawyering well. A firm that is mental-health-informed and unites to implement mini-moments of well-being throughout the workday is best prepared to traverse the uncertainties of the now and those to come.

– LAURA MAHR

Founder of Conscious Legal Minds LLC.

This article originally appeared in Law Practice Magazine printed by the American Bar Association in May 2021. Reprinted with permission.

Laura Mahr is an Oregon lawyer, a North Carolina lawyer, and the founder of Conscious Legal Minds LLC, providing well-being consulting, training, and resilience coaching for attorneys and law offices nationwide. She authors the “Pathways to Well-Being” column in the NC State Bar Journal and the “Mindful Moment” column in the NC Lawyer Assistance Program’s *Sidebar* publication.

Well-Being Week in Law: May 1-5, 2023

“Well-Being Week in Law” is a national event that takes place annually the first week in May. The goal is to raise awareness about mental health and encourage action and innovation to improve well-being throughout the profession.

The Institute for Well-Being in Law, which promotes and coordinates the event, challenges the legal community to come together to effect change for the good of all and invites individuals and organizations alike to get involved and make a difference.

The OAAP is excited to bring you blog posts and resources to enhance your wellness. Each day’s blog post will focus on a different aspect of well-being and will include suggestions to “watch this,” “read this,” and “do this.” You can choose from a veritable buffet of well-being activities all week!

Annual Recovery Dinner Is Back in Person

We are pleased to share that the 34th Annual Attorney Dinner Celebrating Recovery will be held on Friday, April 28, 2023, at the Royal Sonesta Portland Downtown. If you haven’t attended this event before, it’s a great opportunity for fun and fellowship with other lawyers in recovery. If you have, then you know it’s a great time to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. The cost is \$75 per person. You can register at [oaap.org](https://www.oaap.org) or call the OAAP. For more information, contact Doug or Bryan at 503.226.1057.



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Career Resources from the OAAP

FINDING MEANINGFUL WORK

The OAAP holds a periodic 6-session networking and support group for lawyers making job or career transitions called “Finding Meaningful Work.” The sessions assist lawyers in creating a personalized job search plan; developing a mission statement and elevator speech; learning and practicing networking skills; and honing job search skills. Presently, sessions meet virtually through videoconference. To participate or for more information about the next group, please contact OAAP Attorney Counselor Associate Kirsten Blume, JD, MA Candidate, 503.226.1057 ext 11, kirstenb@oaap.org.

CAREER SELF-ASSESSMENT

The OAAP attorney counselors can help you assess your career path and career opportunities. If you would like information about self-assessment, contact OAAP Attorney Counselors Doug Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I, 503.226.1057 ext. 12, douglasq@oaap.org; Kyra Hazilla, JD, LCSW, ext. 13, kyrah@oaap.org; or Bryan Welch, JD, CADC I, ext. 19, bryanw@oaap.org.

OAAP LENDING LIBRARY

Did you know that the OAAP maintains a wide variety of books available for members of the Oregon legal community to borrow? We have titles on diverse topics such as career, stress, anxiety, burnout, relationships, mindfulness, recovery, and retirement that can help you thrive in law and in life. To learn more, call Jeanne Ulrich at 503.226.1057. We invite you to stop by and peruse our shelves!