

IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

A WHOLE NEW WAY OF LIFE

I was working as a contract attorney in a temporary position and I wasn't very happy. I was experiencing a lot of job-related frustration, and I couldn't seem to get much done in my personal life. I was calling in sick regularly – at least a day or two a month. My home was a mess, and my social life was practically nonexistent. Things weren't the way I thought they'd be when I graduated from law school.

I had been dealing with chronic pain for almost ten years, which was interfering with my sleep. Sometimes I would wake up in predawn hours and be unable to go back to sleep. I couldn't turn off my brain. My thoughts kept churning, and it wasn't uncommon to finally fall asleep just before the alarm went off. Instead of jumping out of bed, I'd keep hitting the sleep switch and avoid getting up until I knew I had to or I'd be late to work.

Doing the most basic chores, such as laundry or grocery shopping, felt overwhelming. I had trouble concentrating and couldn't get my act together. It wasn't unusual for me to come home from work on a Friday and not get dressed or leave my apartment all weekend. I'd spend the days on the couch – sort of sleeping and watching television, with a few breaks to eat. I was overweight and craved junk food. I cried easily and felt sorry for myself. Sleep was a welcome escape, especially since I was always tired from my awake times during the night.

My life-changing process started with a phone call to the lawyer assistance program. I met with a counselor who was very easy to talk with and didn't seem surprised by anything I confided. The

counselor referred me to a psychiatrist, who prescribed an antidepressant. The first medication worked to some extent, but it had some undesirable side effects. The second medication worked much better.

I also talked with my psychiatrist about the seasonal component to my depression (seasonal affective disorder, or SAD). My symptoms included extreme irritability and a feeling of loss, of "entering into darkness," in the fall. I began using light box-therapy, adjusting the length of time depending on the season and how I felt. The psychiatrist also stressed the importance of getting out during the day and walking, because exercise and exposure to natural daylight are helpful in alleviating depression.

As a result of talking to the lawyer assistance program counselor and the psychiatrist and taking positive actions to deal with my depression, my life gradually began to get better. My perception of things went from gray and blah to colorful and positive. The best way I can describe the improvement is to say that I was gradually able to see things from the perspective of the glass as half full instead of always half empty. I was much less irritable, tired, and judgmental. Other positive results include improved self-esteem and improved attendance at work. I began to enjoy little things again. Instead of experiencing anxious, racing thoughts all the time, I'm able to enjoy the moment, without thinking about the past or worrying about the future.

I began dating again, scheduled some social activities, and made new friends. I began applying for permanent jobs and cleaned up my apartment. Daily life ac-

OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

503-226-1057
1-800-321-OAAP
www.aaap.org
Helping lawyers
and judges for over
30 years

- Alcohol & Chemical Dependency
- Career Change & Transition
- Gambling Addiction
- Mental Health
- Procrastination & Time Management

A free, nonprofit,
confidential program
for you.

tivities became much easier to do. I joined a weight loss support group and lost weight. I no longer wanted to escape to the couch and sleep all the time.

As a result of treating my depression, I felt good enough about myself that I was no longer willing to endure chronic pain. I felt empowered to find a doctor who was able to diagnose the cause of my chronic pain and correct it with an outpatient surgical procedure. What a difference that made! For the first time in years, I'm now able to sleep without waking up in pain several times during the night.

I also realize that depression is something I need to cope with on an ongoing basis. I'll also continue to be sensitive to changes in seasons and the resulting changes in light that cause me to feel down at various times during the year. I know that part of my depression is cyclical and that I have the coping skills to get through those down times.

As I look back, I think that my decision to call the lawyer assistance program was one of the most important decisions I ever made. That phone call put into motion a series of changes that have made a dramatic and positive difference in my life.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Lawyer, March 2005, published by the D.C. Bar Association. Reprinted with permission.