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## Beating the Odds

I consider myself extremely lucky. I was born in Compton in the 1950s as one of five children. My father had several strokes – and a debilitating one when I was 4 years old. Despite the health risks involved, he worked on the railroad daily with his pick and shovel. I will always admire and respect him for supporting his family at all costs.

After the second stroke, my dad was declared disabled and received \$108 a month in disability pay. My resourceful mom fed a family of seven and paid the bills. Recently, I assisted my mom when she was gravely ill. I found a second mortgage on the house. She never mentioned it but used it to help us make it. One by one, the older kids dropped out of school to support the family. My dad died in 1969. That left a hole in my heart for years.

In August 1965, the Watts riots happened in California. The riots were a spontaneous, desperate combustion about the African American community being unseen and uncared for. But in 1965, I couldn't conceptualize it. I just knew I was afraid. I also lost my best friend in that my library was burned to the ground. As a young person, when I was reading, I got so involved in the book and the stories that I forgot that I was cold or hot or hungry or ill. Books kept me going. I felt like I lost my best friend that day.

As a result of the riots, money started coming into our community. I was a fairly good student because I realized that education was my best chance for a better life. In middle school, I had an opportunity to participate in a program called Project Open Future. The program identified underprivileged talented and gifted students in the Los Angeles area to provide educational enrichment. I could spend five weeks every summer at Santa Barbara-area boarding schools with volunteer teachers and students from private schools.

The second summer I was placed in a school called Midland. A teacher there thought I could be competitive in the English classes he taught and encouraged me to apply as a student at that school. Three weeks later, my life changed irrevocably for the better. I had catching up to do, but I excelled and worked hard. I was told that I could go to any school based on my academic record. I chose to go to a southern California school to be closer to home.

I went in with a great deal of confidence and did well in college. I was a psychology major, but after three years, I realized that I didn't

want to study that anymore. The placement officer asked if I'd thought about law. I said no, I had never really considered it. She told me that lawyers counsel and help people with their lives and their issues. I thought, I don't know that I want to study law. She connected me to the Dean of Students from Willamette College of Law. We clicked. I admired him because of his intelligence, his conversational skills, and his humanity. We talked about Oregon and how Oregon schools were looking to increase their diversity. I remember asking him a couple of things. I said that I would really miss the beaches. He said they had beautiful beaches in Oregon. He failed to mention that they are freezing. I also asked about the weather. It happened to be raining outside at the time. He said the weather was very similar to here.

I was accepted and came to Oregon, but unlike in California, I was the only Latino student in the whole school. I thought maybe I had made a huge mistake. The Hispanic population was concentrated in rural areas, and I felt really isolated and out of place.

One day, I saw a fellow who looked like he was a few years older than me and looked like he might be Hispanic. I introduced myself. He was, in fact, Hispanic and was working for legal aid. I instantly had a mentor. Up until then, I had never even spoken to a lawyer. We are friends to this day. He was a big source of inspiration to me to stick it out and to figure out what I wanted to do and do it.

I was fairly young when I graduated from law school at 24 and felt immature. I couldn't imagine advising people about their lives. So I took an administrative job for a few years, after which I felt it was time for me to learn the trade. I wanted to work as a public defender to learn to try cases. There were a few other Hispanics when I got sworn in. I got accepted to work at the Public Defender's office. Despite the fact that the first day was a total train wreck, my wife encouraged me to go back to work.

Gradually, things started improving. I had my first trial 90 days after starting the job. I was really nervous that I might be discounted as a lawyer because I was a minority. But I could tell the jurors were thinking, if this guy is a minority lawyer, he really has something on the ball. I thought I had really found my professional home.

Several years later my wife and I opened our own firm to the Latino community. I talked about my dream to friends, who thought I was crazy, believing

## Empowered Women: Support Group for Women Lawyers of Color

In fall 2019, the OAAP is offering a new group, Empowered Women, that focuses on women lawyers of color in the first 10 years of practice or less. Join us to build connections and find support with those who share similar concerns. Obtain helpful tools and strategies for professional growth and personal development. Learn ways to use self-care as your path to authenticity and perseverance.

Empowered Women will be facilitated by OAAP Attorney Counselor Karen A. Neri, JD, MA-MCFC candidate. This six-session group will meet at the OAAP on Wednesdays, from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m., beginning October 2 through November 6. For more information or to reserve a space, contact Karen Neri at [karenn@oaap.org](mailto:karenn@oaap.org) or at 503.226.1057 ext. 11.

that the Latino community wouldn't have resources to hire lawyers. Fortunately, they were wrong, and together we had a flow of gratifying cases. My wife practiced personal injury law, while I did public defender work. One of the wonderful things about being a niche lawyer in Oregon is that people get to know you and your reputation and refer cases to you. We had a successful practice for 25 years.

One day a judge asked me if I had ever thought about being a judge. He talked about how gratifying it was to do a lot of good and exercise your intellectual capability to the fullest. Because my wife and I were doing so well in our practice and had three little kids we needed to put through school, I didn't feel I could go down that path at that time. But I never lost sight of the possible dream.

Then I got a call of encouragement from the governor's office. They told me that the governor was interested in talking to me. So I put in an application and was vetted. My letters of recommendation included a prosecutor and a former client who was a convicted felon. When I interviewed with the

governor he said, “well, judge, what do you want to talk about?” It was a very emotional moment for me, knowing that something I had dreamed about had come to fruition.

I have loved every minute of it. It’s an incredible calling. I see people from every walk of life. I see gifted lawyers. I see struggling lawyers. But we all see hope. No matter what the situation is, there is always hope. I had the opportunity to be a drug court judge for a few years. I saw the impact of despair and struggle on people’s lives. I had the chance to make an impact on people. People still come up to me and tell me how they’re doing.

I also love this job because it keeps me sharp mentally. It’s like visiting a river. It’s never the same two days in a row. The day doesn’t necessarily turn out how you thought, but it’s always interesting. My judicial philosophy is to make decisions that will enable me to sleep at night.

My advice to others is to live life with your eyes and ears open. Opportunity will come to you that you won’t necessarily recognize as opportunity unless you are fully engaged. Don’t think that your career will be a straight line. It will take twists and turns. But always be true to yourself. Always treat your adversaries with respect. Always work as hard as you possibly can and know that your preparation on this case is also preparation for the case after that and the case after that. Your reputation is the sum total of everything you’ve ever done. Make sure that when you look back, you’re proud of what you see.

In addition to the previous paragraph, I offer some tips for younger lawyers just starting out:

- Don’t hesitate to ask questions of your colleagues.
- Join a specialty bar that offers CLEs in your area of practice.
- Do some community service outside the law to keep a sense of balance.
- Make time for your family and friends.

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# Happier Where You Are, or Getting to a Better Place

Lawyering is stressful. Many lawyers expect to handle the pressures of solving individuals' high-stakes, emotionally charged problems.

What lawyers don't necessarily anticipate is that they may suffer stress from being stuck in a work situation that is not their first choice. Competition for jobs may mean that a lawyer needs to accept work outside his or her preferred area of practice, work for a difficult boss, or work in a high-pressure, long-hours environment.

The ultimate cure for this kind of stress is to find work that is a better fit. But if there are good reasons for sticking it out for a while, there are steps you can take to be happier where you are.

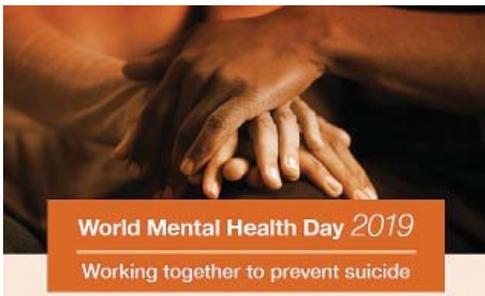
## WHEN WORK IS UNINSPIRING (OR OUTSIDE YOUR PREFERRED AREA)

There may be times in your career when you may need to accept work in an area of practice outside your main area of interest. You may even have to do rote or low-autonomy work. After putting in the effort to obtain a legal education, this can be very discouraging. For financial or personal reasons, you may have decided that you need to stay put until something better comes

along. What can you do to find meaning in uninspiring work?

**Hone general skills.** Regardless of the context, there are certain skills you can hone in almost any legal environment. You can gain proficiency with unfamiliar technologies. You can work on your writing style, aiming for clarity and effectiveness. You can develop your listening skills. Improve whatever skills you can, so that when the right opportunity comes along, you're more likely to be an excellent candidate for the job.

**Practice self-analysis.** Make an effort to learn from your frustration. What are you looking for that you feel is lacking in your current work? Do you crave one-on-one interaction with clients? The authority to make decisions? Variety in the legal issues you encounter? Identifying the features of the right work for you can help identify what you would like to do instead, helping you to steer your future career development. In the meantime, if you feel you can have a positive conversation with your current co-workers and/or practice leaders, let them know how you would like to grow. They are busy, too – maybe they have not turned their minds to your aspirations, and there could yet be a win-win outcome achieved.



## World Mental Health Day 2019

World Mental Health Day is October 10, 2019. It is an initiative of the World Federation for Mental Health and is recognized by the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and numerous other international organizations.

The ABA Law Student Division has joined in a collaborative effort with the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs (CoLAP) and the Dave Nee Foundation to develop a Mental Health Toolkit. You can download the toolkit, as well as browse other essential mental health and wellness resources, at: <https://abaforlawstudents.com/events/initiatives-and-awards/mental-health-resources/>.

If you or someone you care about is struggling with anxiety, depression, or other mental health challenges, the OAAP is here to help. Call and ask to speak with an attorney counselor. It's free and confidential. Call 503.226.1057.

**Find your inspiration elsewhere.** Work need not be the sole source of your personal fulfillment. If your work doesn't offer opportunities to use skills that you value, you can try using those skills in other parts of your life.

If you enjoy public speaking but don't get to do it at work, you could look for opportunities to do so in your community, perhaps in connection with a hobby. If you enjoy being a leader but are very junior in your workplace, you might seek leadership roles in community organizations. If you find fulfillment in making a difference for people in need, and your area of practice does not align with that personal value, you can donate your time and skills to charitable organizations that inspire you. Instead of letting an uninspiring job sour your overall attitude about life, use your energy to build a more satisfying personal and community life. You may also develop competencies that serve you well in your next – and more inspiring – work environment.

**Put a limit on it.** If you are truly miserable in your current situation, mitigate your negative feelings by treating your current position as a time-limited experiment. Determine how long you are willing to stay, define what needs to change and which strategies you are willing to employ to effect those changes, and commit to moving on if you don't see progress. In the meantime, maintain your network of contacts and your positive relationships with coworkers. In other words, don't "check out."

## WHEN YOU HAVE A DIFFICULT SUPERVISOR OR COLLEAGUE

Interpersonal problems can add an enormous amount of stress to work life. A recent Danish study<sup>1</sup> found that a feeling of being treated unfairly by one's boss is likely to lead to worker depression, much more so than a heavy workload. What can you do to minimize the impact of a difficult supervisor on your mood and mental health?

**Practice non-attachment.** The most powerful thing you can do to minimize the impact of a supervisor's or colleague's actions on your mental health is to actively resist taking those actions personally. It's important to give appropriate consideration to feedback and to put effort into finding ways to collaborate, but when a supervisor or colleague's demands or criticisms are unreasonable

## Trans Law Professionals Peer Support Group

The OAAP is pleased to offer a biweekly evening peer support group. This inclusive group is open to all transgender, trans-questioning, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, and intersex judges, lawyers, law students, and legal professionals. This group will be facilitated by OAAP Attorney Counselor Kyra Hazilla, JD, LCSW. For more information, contact Kyra Hazilla at 503.226.1057 or 1.800.321.6227, ext. 13, or at [kyrah@oaap.org](mailto:kyrah@oaap.org).

Not ready for a group? Feel free to reach out to Kyra for alternative resources.

or excessive, they can generate counterproductive stress. Everyone starts out wanting to make a good impression, but once it becomes clear that a supervisor or colleague's support and approval are being unreasonably withheld, it's emotionally healthier to practice "non-attachment" – a concept embraced by Buddhist practitioners, among others. Non-attachment involves letting go of one's desires, including one's investment in particular outcomes, such as winning the approval of others.

Non-attachment can help you weather a wide range of challenging situations and emotions. The article "Let it R.A.I.N. – a journey into mindfulness" on [titleplus.ca](http://titleplus.ca) offers a four-step process for handling difficult emotions.

Another clever technique to avoid taking a colleague's actions personally is to imagine yourself as an actor playing a role, and to "watch" yourself enduring an unpleasant interaction, rather than feeling yourself enduring it. What do you have to say for yourself? What are the feelings you observe? What is your facial expression? Seeing yourself from the perspective of an outside observer, and making adjustments to your own behavior can help you feel like you have some control over the situation.

**Fail better.** Doron Gold, Staff Clinician and Presenter with the Law Society's Member Assistance

*Continued on page 6*

Program (MAP)<sup>2</sup>, notes that particularly in the early years of their careers, many lawyers have a sense of irretrievability: they believe that if they make a mistake they will never recover. The truth is that there are very few permanent mistakes. Working in an environment in which it feels like you can't do anything right may be a golden opportunity to take risks that help you learn and grow. If you're going to be criticized no matter what you do, why not take bolder risks? Fail bigger and better – propose the strategies and defend the positions you truly support.

**Impress yourself.** If there is no way to impress your boss or colleagues, at least you can impress yourself by practicing according to your personal convictions. Learn how to generate internal motivation and a strong sense of self-worth. This kind of personal development will serve you well throughout your career.

One of the dangers of working with a difficult person is that a steady diet of criticism can lead you to doubt your own abilities and to undervalue your skills when it comes time to look for new work. Try to keep a sense of perspective on your skills and protect your self-image. Got a compliment from a

judge, a colleague, or a client? Remember it, and give it at least as much weight as you give to the negative feedback you are receiving.

No mentors? Look further afield. Instead of stewing about the lack of role models within your workplace, look outside the organization for mentors in the profession. As long as you are respectful of their time, many lawyers will be happy to teach you a thing or two.

## WHEN THE HOURS ARE LONG OR THE PRESSURE IS HIGH (OR BOTH)

Depending on the nature of your legal career, the hours may be long, unpredictable, or both. Feeling tired in the face of a grueling schedule is normal; feeling hopeless and depressed is not. Don't ignore symptoms and thoughts that go beyond the normal stress associated with a demanding job.

**Rethink your reactions.** It's a cliché, but there is some truth to it: life is 10 percent what happens to you, and 90 percent about how you react. Consider trying to change how you think about your workload. After all, the work will still be there whether you feel stressed or calm in the face of it. See the passage above about non-attachment, and remind yourself that feeling stress is not the only possible reaction available to you.

**Be clear about the "why."** When your workload is high enough to cause you significant stress, it's important to reflect on why you have chosen your particular career. There are areas of practice, locations, and organizations in which you can practice law without working extremely long hours. If you find yourself in an especially high-pressure work situation, consider whether the sacrifices are worth it.

When asked how they cope with very long hours, many lawyers explain that they feel that the work they do aligns with their values and gives them a strong sense of purpose. Feeling as though you are making a difference and doing work that has value can greatly reduce your stress. If, on the other hand, you *don't* experience this sense of personal reward, long hours are harder to justify.

**Live well outside of work.** If you have no power over your work schedule, you can improve your life satisfaction by working on things over

## ADHD Support Group

The OAAP is offering a continuing, monthly support group for lawyers experiencing the challenges of practicing law with ADHD. This group meets the first Wednesday of each month at the OAAP offices, 520 SW Yamhill St., Ste. 1050, Portland, OR 97204. The group is facilitated by OAAP Attorney Counselor Bryan Welch, JD, CADC I, and focuses on providing peer support and practical skills. There is no fee, but advance registration is required.

If you are interested in participating in this group, contact Bryan at 503.226.1057 or 1.800.321.6227, ext. 19, or e-mail him at [bryanw@oaap.org](mailto:bryanw@oaap.org).

which you do have control. In other words, make sure the rest of your life is the way you want it.

To cope better even on stress-filled days, be sure to take the time to eat properly, get some exercise, prioritize sleep, and get out in the fresh air and sunlight. Many people find that meditation, mindfulness practice, or yoga help them feel calmer and more centered. Finally, take the time to nurture existing relationships with family and friends, and strive to build new ones. Having a supportive social circle can reduce your stress, make your days feel more meaningful, and even improve your physical health.

## INVEST IN YOURSELF

Hardly anyone spends their entire career in his or her “dream job,” and many lawyers will work in less-than-ideal settings. Invest in the best version of yourself by taking steps to be happier where you are, and you will be ready when opportunity finally knocks.

### Footnotes:

1. – The findings of the study were published in three articles in the scientific journals *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, *Psychoneuroendocrinology* and *The Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*. See a summary at: [sciencenordic.com/boss-not-workload-causes-workplace-depression](http://sciencenordic.com/boss-not-workload-causes-workplace-depression).

## National Recovery Month

September celebrates people in recovery and fosters awareness and understanding of recovery from mental health and substance use disorders.

**Join The Voices of Recovery:  
Together We Are Stronger**

Visit the website below for articles, educational resources, and events.

[www.RecoveryMonth.gov](http://www.RecoveryMonth.gov)

2. – The Member Assistance Program (MAP), co-funded by the Law Society of Upper Canada and by LawPRO, can be reached at 1.855.403.8922 (TTY: 1.866.433.3305). Online resources can be accessed at [myassistplan.com](http://myassistplan.com).

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**OAAP COUNSELORS: ♦ SHARI R. PEARLMAN ♦ DOUGLAS S. QUERIN ♦ KYRA M. HAZILLA ♦ BRYAN R. WELCH ♦ KAREN A. NERI**



**Tanya Hanson, JD, Editor**  
503.639.7203

**Barbara S. Fishleder, JD, BBA**  
OAAP Executive Director  
503.684.7425  
barbaraf@oaap.org

## **OAAP ATTORNEY COUNSELORS**

**Shari R. Pearlman (Gregory),  
LCSW, JD**  
OAAP Assistant Director  
sharip@oaap.org

**Douglas S. Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I**  
douglasq@oaap.org

**Kyra M. Hazilla, JD, LCSW**  
kyrah@oaap.org

**Bryan R. Welch, JD, CADC I**  
bryanw@oaap.org

**Karen A. Neri, JD, MA-MCFC**  
Candidate  
karenn@oaap.org

## **FINDING MEANINGFUL WORK**

The OAAP holds a periodic six-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. The group is facilitated by OAAP Attorney Counselor Shari R. Pearlman (Gregory), LCSW, JD. To participate, please contact Shari at 503.226.1057, ext. 14, or at sharip@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 Counselor Shari R. Pearlman (Gregory), LCSW, JD, at 503.226.1057, ext. 14, or at sharip@oaap.org.

## **LAWYERS IN TRANSITION PRESENTATION CALENDAR**

A “Lawyers in Transition” guest speaker is featured quarterly on Thursdays at noon at the OAAP, 520 SW Yamhill, Suite 1050, Portland, Oregon 97204. These presentations are open for anyone to attend. See the calendar below for scheduled speakers.

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**TBA**

For current information on upcoming Lawyers in Transition speakers and topics, please visit the OAAP website at [www.oaap.org](http://www.oaap.org) and click on Events.