



NEWS FOR SOLO & SMALL FIRM PRACTITIONERS

Lawyer Assistance Programs help in many ways

By **David R. Pfalzgraf**, *Lawyer Assistance Trust Chair*



Lawyer Assistance Program services are available to lawyers who may be worried about their law partner, domestic partner or child, who are frustrated with the behaviors of co-workers or family members or who are just plain mad and fed up that their partner, associate, spouse, son, or daughter “Just doesn’t seem to get it.” There isn’t a lawyer who has been in practice over five years who has not faced the problem of addiction or depression in a friend, employee, co-worker, client or family member.

Listed in this newsletter is the contact information for a lawyer assistance staff member or committee leader in your geographic area who can meet with you, discuss your concerns and suggest a course of action which may assist the person for whom you have a concern, but will surely give you a sense that you have taken appropriate steps necessary to address your worries, frustrations and anger.

Also listed in the newsletter are pertinent questions to give to a person for whom you have a concern. Maybe in this way we can return to being “Counselors” as well as Attorneys-at-Law. ■

Bar Association Resources: Personal and Professional Support for Solo and Small Firm Practitioners

Competition, constant stress, long hours and high expectations can wear down even the most competent and energetic lawyer. This can lead to depression, anxiety, gambling, or alcohol and substance abuse, among other problems.

As a first line of assistance for lawyers experiencing addiction or mental health problems, you likely are aware of the Lawyer Assistance Programs of the New York State Bar Association, the New York City Bar Association, and the Nassau and Suffolk County Bar Associations. Those programs provide free, confidential assessment and referral options upon request, along with intervention services and educational programs.

In addition, there are numerous Lawyer Helping Lawyer Committees throughout the state, where volunteer lawyers provide a network of support. [See the calendar card for contact information.]

Perhaps you may not realize that the organized bar has other resources, that provide additional services to aid the solo and small firm practitioner. Taking advantage of such services, or others offered by county and specialty bar associations, can help you avoid the pitfalls that may lead to unfortunate results. This article describes two of the larger bar’s programs.

The **New York City Bar’s Small Law Firm Center** provides education and support to solo and small law firm practitioners interested in developing and maintaining a successful business. The Center offers a “soup to nuts” menu of “what a lawyer needs to know and do” to build a solid practice. At monthly meetings, experts in the profession are invited to speak about various aspects of legal practice, discussing everything from ethical responsibilities and office policies to marketing and billing.

The Center’s Director, Alla Roytberg, a practicing family law attorney, is attuned to the importance of stress and time management — perhaps more so for solo practitioners who may feel they have no one to turn to when problems arise. Every year the Center holds a day-long symposium which includes a workshop on

stress and time management. Joining the Center or attending their events is a perfect way to avoid feeling the isolation some solos experience.

NYC LAP refers many of its solo clients to the Center for professional support; Ms. Roytberg meets the clients on a one-on-one basis to discuss practice management issues. Ms. Roytberg and Eileen Travis, the NYC Bar Lawyer Assistance Program Director, are currently collaborating on a series of stress and time management workshops.

If you are a solo or small law firm practitioner in the New York City area and would like more information about the Small Law Firm Center, please contact Alla Roytberg at 212-382-6638.

Since the **New York State Bar Association’s Law Practice Management [LPM] Committee** was rejuvenated in 2005, they have made significant efforts to offer programs that would help the solo and small firm practitioner. Recent LPM CLE offerings included the following programs: Attorney Escrow Accounts; Starting Your Own Practice; Marketing Your Law Firm; The Lawyer as Employer; and Accounting for Lawyers. All of these programs can be purchased in recorded form on the NYSBA website.

The “Starting your Own Practice” CLE provided information on ethical issues for starting a solo practice, insurance considerations for the solo practitioner, what basic technology you need to start your practice, mistakes you make when hiring your first employee and how to market your solo practice. The Committee plans on offering the course in ’08.

NYSBA is in the process of developing a small and solo firm on-line resource center which will be located on the LPM home page [www.nysba.org/lpm]. This on-line resource center will consolidate the information a small or solo practitioner can use, and it is expected to be available to members in Jan ’08. The site will contain insurance information, sample forms, suggested CLEs, articles, publications and useful links.

continued

Bar Association Resources continued

The LPM website also has information on risk management, which includes forms practitioners can use immediately to start their office such as sample engagement letters, disengagement letters, intake forms, retainer agreements etc. The site also includes an “ask-a-colleague” button where members can ask

their law practice management questions and get a written response from one of our committee members within 2 days.

Remember, help with many personal problems is a phone call away to the Lawyer Assistance Program or committee, at the phone numbers and websites noted on the calendar card. ■



Are You feeling overwhelmed?

The New York State Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program can help.

We understand the competition, constant stress, and high expectations you face as a lawyer, judge or law student. Sometimes the most difficult trials happen outside the court. Unmanaged stress can lead to problems such as substance abuse and depression.

NYSBA's LAP offers free, confidential help. All LAP services are confidential and protected under section 499 of the Judiciary Law.

Call 1.800.255.0569

NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION
LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



You Decide

Take time to review the following questions and consider whether you or a colleague would benefit from available services. If the answer is “yes” to any of these questions, you may need help:

- Are my associates, clients or family alleging that my behavior has changed or that I don't seem myself?
- Is it difficult for me to maintain a routine and stay on top of responsibilities?
- Have I experienced memory problems or an inability to concentrate?
- Am I experiencing difficulties in managing emotions such as anger and sadness?
- Have I missed appointments or appearances or failed to return phone calls? Am I keeping up with correspondence?
- Have my sleeping and eating habits changed?
- Am I experiencing a pattern of relationship problems with significant people in my life?
- Does my family have a history of alcoholism, substance abuse or depression?
- Does my drinking or taking drugs, or misusing prescription drugs, provide a method to deal with my problems?
- In the last few months, have I had more drinks or drugs than I intended, or felt I should cut back or quit, but was unable to do so?
- Is gambling making me careless of my financial responsibilities?
- Do I feel so stressed, burned out and depressed that I have thoughts of suicide?

A Personal View

By Gary R.

Imagine you are a solo practitioner. You are anxious, nervous and stressed about the pressures of practice. You have tried to hold it together but nothing has worked. All you can think about now is running away emotionally and mentally. You need help. Where do you turn?

Luckily, I now know about the Lawyer Assistance Programs (LAP) of both the New York State Bar Association and New York City Bar Association. I know that I have someone to talk to about issues that attorneys in solo practice like me face.

Unfortunately for me, these programs were not available in the early 1980s. I was in the midst of a downward spiral, using drugs and alcohol and grieving over my father's death. Members of my local Bar Association saw that I had a problem but did not know how to address it. Looking back, I was not ready for help at that time and I didn't believe anyone could possibly understand what I was going through.

As a result of my alcoholism and drug addiction, I got into trouble. I was convicted, appropriately, of certain felonies and eventually disbarred. It took those consequences for me to see that drugs and alcohol were not the answer to my problems. I finally got the appropriate treatment and have been clean and sober since June 13, 1985.

When I returned to practice fifteen years later, in recovery for that period of time, I became a peer volunteer for both the State and City Bar Lawyer Assistance Programs. Drawing on the experiences I've had, I can reach out and help other attorneys struggling with drug and alcohol problems.

When I hear about an attorney with other problems, such as depression or other forms of addiction such as gambling, I can refer them to the professional staff at LAP who provide referrals and offer peer support from other volunteers.

I have been able to help many fellow attorneys find recovery and remain in practice. This has brought me great personal satisfaction and I have benefited greatly by contributing to my chosen profession in this way.

I honestly can't say whether having LAP resources available to me when I was losing control would have made a difference in my life.

What I do know is that the Lawyer Assistance Program is here now and if I ever find myself in need of help again, I know exactly where to turn. ■

www.nylat.org



RESOURCE GUIDE

FOR SOLO & SMALL FIRM PRACTITIONERS

Free, Confidential Help with Alcohol or Substance Abuse or Mental Health Issues for Members of the Legal Profession

If you need or want to arrange for help, call any of the following:

NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Program	.(800) 255-0569
NEW YORK CITY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Program	.(212) 302-5787
BROOKLYN BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee	.(212) 788-0485
BROOME COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Program	.(607) 779-1000
CAPITAL DISTRICT	
Lawyer Assistance Committee	.(518) 573-5770
DUTCHESS COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Committee	.(845) 454-9200
BAR ASSOCIATION OF ERIE COUNTY	
Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee	.(716) 852-8687
JEFFERSON COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Helping Lawyer Committee	.(607) 272-2102
MONROE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers Committee	.(585) 234-1950
NASSAU COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Program Committee	.(888) 408-6222
ONEIDA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Committee	.(315) 733-7549
ONONDAGA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer to Lawyer Committee	.(315) 451-2161
QUEENS COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyers Assistance Committee	.(718) 307-7828
ROCKLAND COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Helping Lawyer Committee	.(845) 942-2222
SARATOGA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Committee	.(800) 255-0569
SCHENECTADY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Assistance Program Committee	.(518) 285-8422
SUFFOLK COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Committee on Alcohol and Substance Abuse	.(631) 697-2499
TOMPKINS COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Lawyer Helping Lawyer Committee	.(607) 272-2102
WESTCHESTER COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION	
Committee on Alcohol and Substance Abuse	.(914) 949-7227

You need not be a bar association member to receive their Free, Confidential advice.
All LAP services are confidential under Judiciary Law §499.

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