



NEWS FOR SOLO & SMALL FIRM PRACTITIONERS - 2011

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

DON'T BE THE LAST TO KNOW BY Patricia Spataro, Director, NYSBA Lawyer Assistance Program

In the process of righting the wrongs he had done to his important relationships during his drinking days the attorney met with each person to make amends. He would start the conversation by saying "I am an alcoholic." More often than not the person would respond "I know." He wondered how it could be that he was the last to know.

The word "denial" comes to mind. BUT what if he realized that he was at-risk and took steps to change BEFORE he slid into addiction, would it have made a difference? The answer is "yes" it could have because for many it has.

At-risk drinking means drinking enough to experience serious consequences to health, relationships, career, and well-being. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 35% of the population doesn't drink at all, 37% always drink at low-risk levels, 23% drink at levels that place them at risk for addiction, and 5% are alcoholic. At-risk drinking usually did not rise to the level of warranting intervention... until now.

A recent development in the field of prevention is screening and brief intervention, referred to as SBI. SBI helps those at-risk to make changes that will prevent them from progressing to the depths of addiction. The simple 5 to 10 minute process allows for widespread use and effectiveness. The prevailing thought is to seize opportunities in a variety of settings to identify those at-risk and to provide education and guidance about the risks and about ways to change.

I think such an opportunity exists right now as you read this newsletter. Why not SBI right here, right now? Put your calls on hold (just for 5 minutes) and let's do this....

SCREENING: There are several, well validated screening instruments and the one I've chosen is the AUDIT-C. The AUDIT-C (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) is three questions: They are:

1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?
 - a. Never
 - b. Monthly or less
 - c. 2-4 times a month
 - d. 2-3 times a week
 - e. 4 or more times a week
2. How many standard drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day? (A standard drink size for beer is 12oz., for wine 5oz., and liquor 1.5oz.)
 - a. 1 or 2
 - b. 3 or 4
 - c. 5 or 6
 - d. 7 to 9
 - e. 10 or more
3. How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?
 - a. Never
 - b. Less than monthly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. Weekly
 - e. Daily or almost daily

Scoring: a=0, b=1, c=2, d=3, e=4 add up your score (0-12). If you are a man and your score is 4 or higher or if you are a woman and your score is 3 or higher you may be at risk. Please call LAP or a trusted healthcare provider to discuss your score.

Brief Intervention: Small steps can mean big strides in reducing the risk for alcohol-related problems. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism suggests the following strategies to reduce your drinking:

- **Keep track.** Keep track of how much you drink.
- **Count and measure.** Know the standard drink sizes so you can count your drinks accurately. Standard drink size for beer is 12oz., for wine 5oz., and liquor 1.5oz.
- **Set goals.** Stay within the low-risk limits - no more than 4 drinks a day or 14 per week for men and no more than 3 drinks a day or 7 drinks per week for women.
- **Pace and space.** Drink slowly. Have no more than one drink per hour.
- **Include food.** Drinking on an empty stomach is asking for trouble.
- **Find alternatives.** If drinking helps you cope with stress seek healthy alternatives.
- **Avoid "triggers."** If certain people or places make you drink, try to avoid them.
- **Know your "no."** When offered a drink at times when you don't want one. Have a polite, convincing "no, thanks" ready.

Being the first to know you may be at-risk means everyone else will be the last to know or better yet ... never know. Please call LAP at 800.255.0569 if you have questions or need confidential assistance. You can reach Patricia Spataro at 518.487.5685 or pspataro@nysba.org.

ATTORNEY ARRESTED

BY G.

“**A**ttorney Arrested on Drug Charges, DWI,” read the headline in the local newspaper. I set the paper down slowly, let out a drag of smoke from my trembling cigarette, and drifted into the second from last stage of suicide, the planning stage. This was my bottom, and the pain and despair was so intense that hanging seemed a comfortable path to relief, a blessed solution.

Within hours of the newspaper’s publication, I started receiving phone call after phone call from friends and family. My dark and desperate fantasy of the final solution was being unexpectedly interrupted and diluted by expressions of love and support and hope. My colleagues, my clients, judges, secretaries, clerks, all were offering support and encouragement. They were all reminding me that I was so much more than a lawyer, that I was a person in need, and that I was worthy of the love and support that they were all willing to give. It was the power of this love and support, coming from so many places in my community that chased away my dark and destructive despair, and replaced it with hope and light, and pointed me toward the painful, yet beautiful, path of recovery.

When I smelled like last night’s whiskey, no one called me and offered their care or concern. When I’d walk into a bar after night court, just for a drink or two, but would not get home until three or four, no one said a word. When I was on my self-destructive path, blazing toward the bottom like a red-hot comet shooting across the sky, no one seemed to notice, or worse, no one seemed to care. Why did I have to crash and burn before all of my communities’ love and support rescued me? Why did I have to hit bottom before my friends and family rushed in with the warm embrace of their caring and loving arms?

The line that separates my life between active alcoholic and recovering alcoholic is the blessed gift of despair, drawn across my universe by one single act; the act of surrender. Once I passed over that line, everything changed, not only the signals I sent out, but also the messages I received. On the side of active alcoholic stood a tall beacon of false pride, sending out messages of defensiveness, self-sufficiency and strength, all neatly housed



inside a hard-covered shell. Any attempt to express concern for my drinking would be received and rejected as judgment. My friends and family were afraid that their concern would be misinterpreted as ridicule, hypocrisy or elitism. Either way, any notion they may have had to express concern about my drinking was most assuredly dissuaded by my own subtle signals, given off by the way I walked and talked; the subtle message given off by most alcoholics to friend and family alike: I’m fine. Mind your own business.

Cross over the line of blessed despair and into the world of recovering alcoholic, and where the beacon of false pride once stood, now stands the stripped down essence of my being, humility. It is this humbled vulnerability, this utter surrender to my disease that changed not only the signals I was sending, but the messages I received. The strut of false pride and the hard-covered shell of blind confidence designed to cover my shame and guilt was now replaced with an absolute realization that I too am every bit as flawed as every other. The subtle signal I was now sending was this: I am no better and I am no worse. I just need help and understanding. I cannot do this alone.

Once my friends and family received this new message, their fears of having their concerns misinterpreted and rejected vanished. They were no longer afraid of being accused of acting holier-than-thou. They could sense that I was now ready to receive their love and support. It is not the crash-and-burn bottom that marks the change of signals sent and received. It was surrendering to my disease that finally created the symbiotic balance between the signals sent and the messages received; the humbling realization of my own vulnerability invited the natural impulses of humanities’ most treasured virtue, to express care and concern to those in need.

Positive Attitude & Gratitude

BY Barbara Smith, NYLAT Director

Another year of difficult economic times may not readily conjure positive thoughts and gratitude in you, but perhaps if it did, you might feel better. Recently, I’ve returned to reading more about resilience and how attitudes can help to shape our reality. A recent blogpost [lawyerswellbeing.com/blog] dealt with the concept of gratitude, which began with humor –

Who is a grateful person?

An optimist sees the glass as half full.

The pessimist sees the glass as half empty.

The grateful person is happy to have a glass.

The blogger, Harvey Hyman, attributes the anecdote to Robert Emmons, Ph.D., a psychology professor at UC Davis, and expert on the science of gratitude. Emmons might ask you to consider how you live your life – is it built on gratitude or pervasive complaint, do you count your blessings or your burdens? Your basic orientation (gratitude vs. negativity) can have a huge impact. Dr. Emmons’ studies show that people who are grateful exercise more, sleep better, enjoy better health, live longer, have more satisfying relationships, and more success at work.

If you are interested in learning more about practicing gratitude, you may wish to read Emmons’ book “Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier.”*

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