

Stronger Together:  
Addressing Mental Health  
and Substance Abuse as a  
Legal Community

Presented by Jessica Vittorio

# Agenda

1. My Story
2. Ways to take care of yourself
3. Ways to take care of others
4. Our obligation as lawyers
5. Resources available

# \*\*Trigger Warning\*\*

This presentation contains references to, and stories involving, substance abuse, mental health issues, suicide, death, trauma, and other topics that may be difficult or triggering for some individuals. While the references and stories are normally brief, if the information feels overwhelming or too much for you, please feel free to leave the presentation at any time. Take care of yourself, first! :)

# My Story



1-25-2018



agora  
9.17.2

# Sobriety fears and concerns

- Will I still be able to network and socially engage with people? - Yes
- Will people think less of me or be concerned about my professional performance? - No
- What happens if I fail? - Try again, sobriety is a progress not perfection journey
- What happens if it's too overwhelming? - Finding a support system is critical, and developing alternative habits to help navigate and handle feelings, struggles, etc.

Ways to take  
care of yourself

# Most common issues attorneys face....

- Stress/Anxiety
- Depression
- Burnout/Secondary Trauma
- Alcohol/Substance Abuse
- Cognitive Impairment
- Suicide
- Gambling/Process Addictions

# ABA Study of approx. 13,000 attorneys showed...

- 46% have experienced depression
- 28% experience ongoing depression
- 19% experience anxiety disorder
- 10% have considered suicide



# Tips and strategies for self-care

- Set boundaries (define, communicate, enforce)
- Eat well (95% of serotonin is produced in the gastrointestinal tract)
- Exercise (30 min. of moderate intensity exercise 3 days a week, does not need to be continuous)
- Practice meditation/mindfulness (explore various styles and find one that works for you)
- Build support systems
- Be aware of your habits and patterns
- Seek professional help, when needed

Ways to take  
care of others

# Community and conversation matters

- 33% of people 24 and under feel comfortable talking about mental health, where 48% of people 25-74 feel comfortable, and 63% of people over 75 feel comfortable
- 40% of men have never spoken to anyone about mental health
- 1 in 5 US adults have experienced mental illness
- 1 in 20 US adults have experienced significant mental illness

# Tips and strategies for helping others

- Encourage them to seek professional help
- Share education and resources
- Provide social support
- Advocate for helpful and appropriate policies
- Be available to listen (8 minutes)
- Treat them with respect, compassion, and empathy

# Our obligation as lawyers

# The Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct give us guidance....

- 1.01(b) - Competent and diligent representation
- 8.03(a) - Report lawyer misconduct
- 8.03(c) - Option to report misconduct to peer assistance program
- 8.04 - Definition of misconduct
- Supporting Laws (ADA, OSHA, FMLA)

# Resources

- 988 Lifeline
- SAMHSA - [samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)
- Texas Lawyers Assistance Program - [tlaphelps.org](https://www.tlaphelps.org)
- Texas Lawyers Assistance Program - 1-800-343-TLAP



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