

CHICAGO LAWYER[®]

40TH ANNIVERSARY

INSIDE OUT

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HAT IS WELLNESS TO YOU?

Martini: Wellness means that you have attained sufficient balance across

different facets of your life. You have attained a mindfulness with regard to taking care of yourself across different aspects of your everyday existence, which leads to you having a healthy mind, body and attitude. You have an innate understanding what you need to do to keep yourself on track and not to let any one aspect of it, particularly work, dominate your life to the exclusion of others.

Susler: I think of wellness holistically — taking care of your body, mind and spirit. We tend to focus on the physical aspects of wellness, taking care of your body and physical health. However, it is important to also tend to your mind, your mental well-being and your spiritual well-being in order to be truly healthy.

WHY IS WELLNESS IMPORTANT FOR LAWYERS?

Martini: Wellness is important for lawyers because of the intense nature of what we do. Practicing law is very demanding and stressful, with there being a lot on the line with much of what we do. Oftentimes, it is easy for our job to take over our lives, particularly as we get busy, to the exclusion of everything else in our lives. While sometimes this is a necessary evil to get through a particularly busy time, longer term it is unhealthy to only focus on work and ignore all of the other things that make us who we are and which enable us to live balanced lives where we take care of ourselves and our bodies.

Susler: In 2016, the American Bar Association collaborated on a study with the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. It found “21 percent of licensed, employed attorneys qualify as problem drinkers, 28 percent struggle with some level of depression and 19 percent demonstrate symptoms of anxiety.”

The problem is serious enough that Illinois amended its MCLE [Mandatory Continuing Legal Education] requirements in 2017 to require one hour of mental health and substance abuse training as part of the professional responsibilities CLE requirement.

The ABA has also adopted model rules relating to wellness and reducing mental health and substance abuse among lawyers. Focusing on our overall wellness can help us better cope with the stresses of our jobs and our lives generally and increase our odds of staving off these dangerous pitfalls.



THE ROAD TO WELLVILLE

Wellness should be a focus for all attorneys

By **CHRISTINA L. MARTINI** and **DAVID G. SUSLER**

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WELLNESS EXERCISES OR ACTIVITIES?

Susler: Taking a CLE course is a good start but that alone will not change anything. Some simple things everyone can do to reduce daily stresses include eating well, exercise and meditation. Take a break from your overwhelming workload and go out to dinner with your spouse, family or a friend occasionally. Check in with your friends and colleagues, especially if you are concerned they may be struggling with untreated depression or substance abuse. Tend to your spiritual health, which may include going to church, synagogue or mosque or simply meditating at home.

In addition, you must tend to your mind, which means not only taking an occasional break from work but also may mean working with a therapist. Therapy is a powerful tool for coping with the stresses of work and life and should not be dismissed. We need to end the negative stereotypes attached to depression and other mental illnesses, as well as substance abuse, and understanding they are diseases that can be treated. If you are suffering from any of these diseases, seek help and support your friends and colleagues who may be struggling in seeking treatment as well.

WHY MAKE WELLNESS A PRIORITY?

Martini: There are a number of things that happen when wellness is not prioritized. For example, if

you are not getting enough sleep, but you keep working long hours and try to get by with caffeinating a lot, it becomes a chronic, vicious circle, because the caffeine will cause your adrenal glands to work overtime, which can have significant adverse impacts, both short and long term.

It will likely impact your sleep patterns too — coffee and stress are not a good combination for getting sleep. All of these issues often go hand-in-hand with poor eating habits, often substituting fried food or sugars because they can be easier to come by especially late at night or in a pinch.

The upshot is that if you don't sleep, don't eat properly and don't exercise, this starts to not only impact your ability to think, reason, make judgments and your overall performance. It will also affect your interactions with others, your work and your personal relationships. CL

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is a partner with McDermott Will & Emery and focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, internet, advertising and unfair competition law.

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To submit a question, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com