

LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

ASKING FOR HELP

As the executive director of the Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (LAP), I am always trying to envision new and better methods to encourage lawyers, judges and their family members to feel comfortable about contacting LAP for confidential help with problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, compulsive gambling, sex addiction, depression and other mental disorders. However, it is not an easy task because most of us resist asking for help with these problems until a crisis has been reached.

The reasons for resisting help are numerous. For one thing, there is the myth that asking for help is a sign of weakness. In fact, however, asking for help empowers people because it allows them to face chronic problems head-on, instead of being stuck in a quagmire of secret misery. It also is a myth that smart and successful people don't need help. As any great leader will tell you, it is sometimes necessary to rely on the expertise of others to successfully solve a problem.

Lawyers and judges are particularly resistant to the concept of seeking help, especially for a personal problem. As professionals, we are not accustomed to surrendering to anything. This is not surprising given our training. In law school, we developed intellectual stamina and analytical skills that afford us legitimate academic confidence. While practicing law, we gained well-earned confidence in complex problem solving. Simply put, as lawyers and judges, we are trained to *handle* problems, not *suffer* problems.

Our admirable attributes of independence and tenacity serve us well right up until we suffer a personal problem that can't be outsmarted. Alcoholism, drug addiction, depression and other physiologically-based chemical brain diseases simply can't be defeated with analytical skills and confidence. You can't "lawyer"

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your way out of alcoholism or chemical brain diseases. As such, the self-reliance that previously served lawyers and judges so well can be their total undoing because it blocks the path to help.

In the end, fear is at the core of why most people are reticent to reach out for help. While an internal struggle over "seeking help" versus "maintaining secrecy and hoping for the best" rages within the individual in trouble, time is of the essence more than that person imagines. Sadly, it is common that an individual will resist seeking help until the problem becomes a full-blown crisis. By procrastinating and not seeking help early on, more serious consequences accumulate and the road to recovery becomes more arduous. In the worst scenarios, the inability to seek help costs the person his or her life. These deaths are not publicized, but they are happening nonetheless — right here, right now and within our legal profession.

It is my goal to reduce the fear of asking for help and encourage members of the Louisiana State Bar Association and their families to feel comfortable in seeking assistance from LAP before a crisis occurs. The *Louisiana Bar Journal* has graciously invited me to be a regular contributor on behalf of LAP and that will certainly be invaluable in helping work toward that goal. To that end, I plan to share ongoing information about LAP, facts about the ongoing sciences

of successfully treating diseases such as alcoholism, addiction and depression, and even share recovery stories by those who wish to contribute.

Some of the happiest and most productive people I know in the legal profession found their way to LAP and received the help they needed. Their prior path of pain and hopelessness has been transformed into a happy and healthy journey of recovery and hope. They have successfully escaped the darkness and isolation they previously suffered.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis once said, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant," and that holds true for dispelling old stigmas that impede one's ability to seek help for alcoholism, addiction, depression and other diseases. I am hopeful that future LAP articles will help shine light into the darkest corners of the subject matters at hand and, by so doing, reduce fears and foster a greater trust in the simple premise that asking LAP for help can literally make the difference between life and death.

In the meantime, if you think you have (or are concerned about someone else regarding) a problem with alcohol, drugs, depression or any other mental condition, contact LAP without delay. Your call is absolutely confidential as a matter of law and you do not even have to give your name. Whether you need immediate help or want general information on what help is available, call LAP toll free at (866)354-9334 or email your inquiry to lap@louisianalap.com.

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