

A photograph of a man and a woman on a catamaran boat. The man is wearing a white t-shirt, blue patterned shorts, a white cap, and sunglasses. He is leaning on the boat's railing. The woman is wearing a light blue tank top and sunglasses, and is holding a small object. The boat has a blue cover and is on the water under a clear sky.

One on One with Buddy Stockwell, Executive Director of the Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc.

Interviewed by Jack K. Whitehead, Jr.

Buddy Stockwell and his wife, Melissa, on board their catamaran, Indigo Moon. Photo provided by Buddy Stockwell.

JE. (Buddy) Stockwell, the new executive director of the Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (LAP), obtained his BS degree in management from Louisiana State University in 1989 and his JD degree from LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center in 1993. Upon graduation from LSU Law Center, he practiced at Roy, Kiesel & Tucker in Baton Rouge, representing the FDIC and RTC in litigation seeking recovery of funds paid out in cases involving negligence and gross negligence by the officers and directors of failed institutions.

In 1995, Stockwell became an associate at Clary Law Firm, a general law practice in Baton Rouge, and, in 1997, he opened his own general solo practice in Baton Rouge, ultimately focusing on family law and child custody litigation.

In 2004, Stockwell sold his law office and undertook a five-and-a-half-year sailing adventure with his wife, Melissa. They sailed 18,793 nautical miles covering areas as far north as Cape Cod and points south as far as the eastern and western Caribbean, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama. Stockwell is a Navy veteran, USCG licensed captain, certified SCUBA diver and expert ocean mariner.

Upon Stockwell's return in 2010 from the sailing adventure, then-executive director of LAP, William R. (Bill) Leary, was set to retire after 25 years as executive director. Stockwell assumed the position in January 2011 and is now residing in Mandeville, La., where the offices of LAP are also now located.

Whitehead: Buddy, tell us a little bit about your background.

Stockwell: I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1955. My Dad grew up, however, in New Roads in Pointe Coupee Parish. When I was born, we were moving around a lot due to his job as a salesman for Delta Airlines. I have a sister two years older than I am. By the time I was 5 and my sister was 7, in 1960, we were living in Wichita Falls, Texas, and my parents sold our home and we set out for a grand adventure. We drove to New York City in an old Plymouth and my Dad sold it on the docks for \$50 and we boarded a French cruise ship and crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Upon our arrival in Europe, we ordered a

Volkswagen camping bus and stayed in the small town of Igls, Austria, in the mountains above Innsbruck for three months while waiting for the bus to be delivered. Thereafter, we traveled throughout the campgrounds of Europe for a year and then brought the Volkswagen camper back on a Lykes Line freighter and docked in New Orleans. After that adventure, we moved to New Roads and my life in Cajun Country began. I started the first grade at Poydras High in New Roads already knowing how to read, having made two Atlantic crossings, and having traveled all over Europe. It was quite an education and I was a very hard act to follow on "show and tell" day in the first grade.

Whitehead: So I guess it was not a stretch for you to go on your recent sailing adventure?

Stockwell: When you couple that early adventure with growing up boating on False River, a stint in the Navy, and a love for the water, it was not a surprise. My wife, Melissa, and I have no children and were able to save our pennies to fund a grand adventure. We wanted to go while we were young enough to physically handle the rigors of offshore sailing as a couple. It was a smart move. We have lots of followers around the world who have been inspired by our sailing web site, www.indigomoon.us.

Whitehead: Now that you are home from your big adventure, what made you interested in running the Lawyers Assistance Program?

Stockwell: I cannot think of a higher calling, really, than to be here for my fellow brothers and sisters in the Bar who suffer from alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling addiction, depression or any of the many other problems that beset lawyers and judges. LAP saves lives, literally, and my background makes me well-suited for the position of executive director. I served on the Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse for more than 15 years, participated in interventions with lawyers and judges, served as a monitor for those in the LAP Recovery Programs, spoke at public functions and CLEs to raise awareness about impairments lawyers and judges fall victim to, and helped get the word out about LAP's confidential services. I have personally been part of the recovery community for more than 28 years. I have earned more than 120 accredited hours in substance abuse counseling courses. Basically, I love to help others in need. That is why I liked family law so much. People go through some very dark days in the midst of divorce and child custody cases. As a family law practitioner, I worked closely with mental health professionals



Buddy Stockwell diving in Bonaire during his five-and-a-half-year sailing adventure. Photo provided by Buddy Stockwell.

in many cases to help clients through the toughest periods in their lives. I found it extremely rewarding on both a professional and personal level. So, running LAP is a dream job for me.

Whitehead: What impairment issues are at the forefront now within the legal profession?

Stockwell: Depression is the worst statistic we face. Johns Hopkins conducted a depression study comparing more than 100 different professions and the legal profession is by far the most depressed. Rates are estimated at up to 30 percent. A close second is alcoholism and drug addiction. The legal profession suffers those diseases at a rate of 20 percent, which is double the general population's rate. Much headway has been made in reaching out to alcoholics and addicts, not only in the legal profession but in the general population, because much of the stigma surrounding those diseases has waned due to the fact that science has now proven that those afflictions are physiologically-based chemical brain diseases to be treated, not moral failings to be judged. The same does not hold true, however, for other chemical brain diseases like depression. Much of the old stigma remains when it comes to mental illnesses. That makes my job very tough, because those with the most prevalent impairment are the hardest to reach.

Whitehead: What services does LAP offer?

Stockwell: LAP provides many different services to the profession. First and foremost, an impaired individual (or individual concerned about a colleague) can call LAP and obtain information and help confidentially. La. R.S. 37:221 and Supreme Court Rule XIX16(J) mandate that all calls to LAP and communications to the LSBA's Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse are absolutely confidential. *Only the person in trouble can waive confidentiality.* Another distinct service LAP offers is monitoring under a LAP Recovery Agreement. Monitoring services are a mechanism by which an impaired individual entangled in the disciplinary system can formally establish that they are in recovery. In addition, the Louisiana Supreme Court's Committee on Bar Admissions refers law students and bar

applicants to LAP for evaluations when their history suggests potential substance abuse and/or other potential impairment issues. Depending on the outcome of the evaluation, the applicant may be required by the court to enter into a LAP Recovery Agreement and Monitoring program both before sitting for the bar exam and after being conditionally admitted. Last but not least, LAP provides education and information about chemical brain diseases that plague the legal profession and what effective treatments are available. Education and increased awareness fosters early intervention and treatment, and that in turn protects the public by reducing the scope of unethical behavior by impaired lawyers and judges.

Whitehead: What are the challenges LAP faces in the future?

Stockwell: Of course, increasing the number of impaired judges and lawyers helped *early on before a crisis* is our goal. If a person reaches out for help before things have deteriorated to the point that discipline is somehow involved, the path to recovery is less troublesome. If the statistics are correct (and there is no reason to doubt them), there are approximately 4,000 members of the Louisiana Bar caught in the grip of alcohol and/or drug abuse or dependency, and 6,000 members of our Bar who suffer some measurable form of depression. That means thousands and thousands of our peers are out there suffering serious impairments that can, if left untreated, literally kill them. It is staggering to think about and it is all a challenge for LAP indeed. The other challenge I face as the new executive director is securing the funding necessary to expand and diversify LAP's services to effectively meet ever-increasing demands. We are very busy at LAP. The practice of law is not becoming less stressful and the impairment issues we face in the legal profession are not going to go away. If I have my way, LAP will continue to increase programs to educate the Bar and encourage its members to reach out for help.

Whitehead: Leave us with a story from your sailing adventure.

Stockwell: We met a lot of different people out there sailing in paradise. You never knew who you would bump

into . . . literally from rocket scientists to garbage men and everyone in between. For example, on New Year's Eve 2006, I was at a gathering on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We were all outside on the grounds of the Annaberg Sugar Plantation ruins overlooking Sir Francis Drake Channel on a beautiful tropical night. As I mingled amongst the crowd, a very affluent-looking woman asked where I was from and I explained I had sold my law office in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and that my wife and I were out on a sailing adventure, and our boat was moored nearby. She said "Wow! That must have taken some guts!" I explained that some of my fellow Baton Rouge lawyers were calling me the "Shawshank Man" because I had somehow managed to miraculously escape the grind of litigation practice. She said, "Oh, that's just priceless! My fiancée, Frank Darabont, is going to LOVE that! He directed the *Shawshank Redemption*!" So I gave her my card and said, "Tell Frank hello for me and that Tim Robbins is cool but he's just an actor. I'm the real deal!" We had a good laugh under the bright Milky Way on a fine New Year's Eve in the Caribbean.

If you need help or want more information, call LAP toll-free at (866)354-9334, e-mail LAP at LAP@louisianalap.com, or peruse a plethora of information about LAP on the Web at www.louisianalap.com.

Buddy Stockwell's article on "Preventing Depression, Burnout and Stress in the Legal Profession" begins on the following page.

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Preventing Depression, Burnout and Stress in the Legal Profession

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

The first step is acknowledging a problem exists. Lawyers and judges are extremely independent and self-sufficient by nature and it is not in our natures to admit anything that can be remotely perceived as a weakness. Plus, smart lawyers and judges are convinced they can think their way out of all the problems they encounter. Sadly, this is literally killing people in our profession.

Every lawyer and judge needs to become more aware of depression and burnout and how “white knuckling” through long periods of anxiety, stress and lower levels of depression can, without warning, crescendo into catastrophic events that take the lawyer by surprise.

Lawyers and judges all too often consider stress and depression to be acceptable components of their job description. They do not take care of themselves and rarely put themselves first. This results in an alarming number of mental breakdowns and, in the most heartbreaking cases, suicide.

These tragedies often hit close to home. One of my best friends from Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center jumped off the New Orleans Crescent City Connection Mississippi River Bridge in 2009 and fell to his death. He was in his early 40s and suffered from depression. Since Jan. 1, 2011, during my tenure as the new executive director of the Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc., one Louisiana lawyer has killed himself by gunshot to the head. Another is recovering from a near miss with suicide. As one would expect, these incidents are virtually never publicized and that results in the severity of the epidemic of depression and suicide being shielded from view.

Accordingly, the epidemic of depression in the legal profession still remains largely out of sight and mind. While members of our profession are becoming more cognizant of the alarming statistics, it is still extremely difficult to convince lawyers and judges that no one is immune from depression.

If you are feeling stressed out, burned

out and not exactly “happy, joyous and free” in the legal profession, here are some suggested courses of action¹ that lawyers and judges can employ to prevent or mitigate burnout and depression:

1. Re-assess your balance of career success versus personal fulfillment. Sacrificing time with family and rarely having time for interests outside work and the practice of law indicates a potential need for recalibration. Make it a point to set goals to better balance work and play.

2. Don’t allow yourself to become isolated. Get out of the office and the house and make sure you are still genuinely and openly involved with friends and engaged in extracurricular activities and hobbies that are NOT in any way associated with being a lawyer, judge or practicing law.

3. Listen to others. Pay attention to signs that perhaps you need to change problematic interpersonal habits and pessimistic thinking.

4. Beware of the “golden handcuffs” and becoming so entrenched in a high-income lifestyle that it is difficult to scale back billable hours as necessary to make time for a healthy personal life outside the practice of law.

5. Don’t bring your “lawyering” home with you. Being skeptical, judgmental and striving to always be “right” with friends and family can destroy those personal relationships.

6. Be cognizant that, as lawyers and judges, we are trained to operate at a high level of intellectual abstraction that is analytical and disconnected from personal emotions so as to allow us to represent clients effectively. That mode of thinking, however, can be severely damaging to our well-being if stress is allowed to fester. Mental health care professionals recommend that lawyers and judges take the time to develop and adhere to a daily routine of stress management tools such as exercise, diet, meditation, yoga and simple things such as learning to say “no” to new tasks when overburdened and stressed out.

All of these topics are rooted, first and foremost, in the issue of a need for an increase in general awareness. Until lawyers and judges become more aware of the true epidemic of stress, burnout and depression in the legal profession, and how it is impacting them personally, our profession will remain under siege.

The good news is that there are members of our profession making a difference and speaking out publicly about their personal experiences with mental health issues such as depression. The Erie Bar Foundation in New York has produced the short film, “A Terrible Melancholy,” that centers on Abraham Lincoln’s history of chronic depression. The film also, in part, features appearances by Dan Lukasik, a lawyer who recovered from depression and then spearheaded www.lawyerswithdepression.com.

Lukasik’s depression website provides a plethora of information about depression: what it is, what causes lawyers and judges to suffer from it at shocking rates, and what can be done to combat it.

If you are interested in obtaining more information on ways to beat burnout, stress, anxiety and depression, or you feel that you could possibly benefit from an evaluation, contact the Lawyers Assistance Program. Your call is confidential as a matter of law and there is no obligation whatsoever. You don’t even have to give your name. Contact the Lawyers Assistance Program at: (866)354-9334; via e-mail at LAP@louisianalap.com; or visit the web at www.louisianalap.com.

FOOTNOTE

1. These suggestions are derived from the article “Mental Health in the Legal Profession” by Scott Mitchell, *Diversity & The Bar*, October 2007.

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