



Austin attorney Dicky Grigg, a volunteer peer assister for the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program, isn't afraid of taking the tough cases.

Peer Renew

How volunteer attorneys with the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program can help colleagues in need.

INTERVIEW BY LOWELL BROWN

When lawyers struggle with mental problems or substance abuse, the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program is there to help. Through peer assistance, TLAP sends an attorney—who has been through his or her own addictions or troubles—to serve as a listening ear. Often, that means calling Austin lawyer Dicky Grigg. “He’s someone we call who adheres to that belief [in helping the suffering] and will not say no,” said Bree Buchanan, a staff attorney with the program. “He’s also been doing this for long enough that he’s not afraid of hard cases.” Grigg spoke to the *Texas Bar Journal* about the program and why he considers every call a success.

You've been described as a tireless volunteer peer assistor. How would you explain your role with the program?

Have drunk, will travel. My role, and the role of all volunteers, is to go out and let somebody know that there is help and they're not alone. What makes it effective is that volunteers are all lawyers who have had problems in the past. We're not judgmental, and we can damn sure identify with the problems that the lawyer is going through.

Why is this work important to you?

It's extremely important because the legal profession, really more than other professions, has a high number of lawyers who are impaired, who have problems with alcohol, drugs, or depression, because it's a high-stress business.

Program attorneys say you're one of the peer assistors they trust most to step in on the hardest cases, when attorneys hit "rock bottom." Those must be tough conversations to have. How do you navigate them?

Every one is different. One of the symptoms of this disease is denial, so they deny and they can't see sometimes—or they can't admit, at least—that they have a problem. So, many times you go out and they're not receptive. Other times, somebody is very receptive. And many times, when you're talking about somebody who has hit rock bottom, they're ready for help and they want help. When you approach them and let them know you've been there, that's something that gives you an opening with people.

Is that a card you play right away or only when you need it?

I play it every time, and usually you do it pretty up-front. Every time, I talk to them about my experience. I've been sober a little over 28 years. My problem was alcohol, and it got to where it was interfering with my practice, with my family, and with my life in general. And it was getting worse and worse, because this disease is progressive. Thank God some people who cared about me intervened.

So people cared enough to step in, and you want to be that person for someone else.

Sure, because that's one of the main problems that anybody with a substance abuse problem or depression has. They're isolated. Something that really worried me and I think worries most lawyers is the effect it's going to have on their practice if somebody finds out they have a drinking problem or drug problem.

Do you think a lot of people resist calling TLAP for that reason?

Oh, yeah. But the opposite is true. Alcoholism and drug addiction are progressive, and they only get worse. So if you have a drinking problem or one of your law partners has a drinking problem, they're a walking malpractice case. It is not going to get better. If somebody has a part-

ner or somebody in their office has got a problem, they need—not only for that person's sake but for the sake of their firm—to call TLAP and get that person some help.

Without betraying any confidentiality, can you give us an idea of the types of calls you deal with?

TLAP helped one lawyer who came out of law school with great grades, at the top of his class, and started with a big law firm. When somebody finally called TLAP on him, he was living in the street and breaking into cars to steal stuff to support his habit. I mean, he went from the top of the legal profession to the bottom. TLAP worked with a trust to obtain payment for his recovery, and he is now back working in the legal profession and is doing fine. There are those sorts of spectacular stories, but I think where they can help the most is to get them help before they get there.

I know it's hard to track results in programs like these, but are there reasons to believe TLAP is succeeding?

Every call I've ever made is a success because it helps me. I do what I can, and then I've got to let it go, because it's up to the person who needs help to get the help. I can't do it for them. Sometimes, but very seldom, do we go to somebody and they say, "Yeah, I need treatment now," and we get treatment for them. But we plant a seed, and you never know what's going to grow from that seed. **TBJ**

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

for these **career-building mediation and arbitration courses** from the A.A. White Dispute Resolution Center at the University of Houston Law Center.

40-HOUR BASIC MEDIATION TRAINING

41.75 hours of CLE credit, includes 4.5 hours of ethics. All materials meals, and parking included. Total cost: \$1,185.

JANUARY 6-10, 2014 (five days total)

Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

JUNE 6-8 & JUNE 13-15, 2014 (six days total)

Fridays 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Saturdays 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Sundays 11:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

SEPT. 12-14 & SEPT. 19-21 13-15, 2014 (six days total)

Fridays 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Saturdays 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Sundays 11:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

SPECIALIZED COURSE IN COMMERCIAL ARBITRATION

28 hours of CLE credit, includes 4.75 hours of ethics. All materials meals, and parking included. Total cost: \$1,925.

JANUARY 8-11, 2014 (four days total)

Wednesday - Friday 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Saturdays 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON | LAW CENTER

UH is an EEO/AA institution.