

► Practicing law is stressful. Heavy workloads and client stories affect attorneys both physically and psychologically. It is important to be aware of the symptoms of stress and actively work to stay healthy. For more information, go to texasbar.com/tlap and click on “wellness.”

It Is Never Too Late

Taking the time for attorney wellness.

BY **JERRY C. ALEXANDER**

In February of this year, the American Bar Association and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation released the findings of a wide-ranging study that concluded one in every three practicing lawyers is a problem drinker, 28 percent suffer from depression, and 19 percent show symptoms of anxiety. In other news, it has been reported that the Pacific Ocean is wet.

Of course lawyers experience alarmingly high levels of stress and

anxiety—major causes of alcohol and substance abuse. Younger lawyers have to deal with the added strain of a challenging job market and often crippling student loan debt, while many older lawyers have put off retirement and resigned themselves to working longer in an uncertain economy.

But the important question is, What can we do about it? Changing the nature of lawyering is not likely to happen anytime soon. Demanding clients, tight deadlines, and billing quotas come with the territory, not to mention those of us with the added pressure of being responsible for whether someone goes free or spends a portion of his or her life in prison. While pessimism is part of what some in our profession praise as prudence, it is not a particularly helpful outlook when balancing one’s temperament or stopping to smell the roses.

To truly help ourselves become less stressed or, at least, better equipped to deal with stress, we can start by adopting healthier habits like watching our diets and getting regular exercise. A survey done by the Center for Creative Leadership found that 92 percent of lawyers knew that what they ate and how much they exercised greatly affected their health, yet more than 60 percent were dissatisfied with their fitness level and more than half rated their diets as “unhealthy.” It is not like we do not know these things are important; we just fail to take the next step of doing something about it. Part of that stems from a lack of

encouragement from those around us—64 percent of the lawyers in that same survey said they wished their firms would do more to support their fitness levels and wellness.

That is why one of the first steps I took when I became president of the Dallas Bar Association in January was to appoint an athletic director for the association. He is Ken Raggio, a distinguished family lawyer and world-class athlete. In 2014, Ken finished second in his age division for the 800-meter run—in the world—and he has also placed in national stair-climbing competitions. Ken shares his tips for living longer, and living better, each month in the *Dallas Bar Headnotes*. Whether it is the benefits of varying your exercise routine, having a travel plan for diet and exercise, or incorporating more movement and even yoga poses into your time at the office, our DBA athletic director has pointers that benefit everyone.

Also realizing the importance of wellness for our community, the *Texas Bar Journal* is kicking off its own work-life column, where readers can gain valuable insight into that difficult feat of balancing our jobs with our health and happiness.

And let us face it—following a healthy diet and getting regular exercise makes good business sense, too. It strengthens the immune system, improves cognitive function, and helps even high-performing individuals become more productive. More importantly, though, you will be less stressed out and happier—and so will those who depend on you. **TBJ**

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