



Overcoming Anxiety

BY CAMERON VANN

An informal survey shows that the majority of Texas lawyers experience anxiety. Some attorneys are troubled only by periodic bouts of anxiety, but for many, anxiety is a chronic problem. If you are ready to transition from a state of anxiety to a positive mental state — from which you can provide enthusiastic representation for your clients and work at your most effective and efficient — assess your circumstances and review the coping strategies below.

Anxiety can result in the following symptoms and behaviors: apprehension, uneasiness, feelings of impending problems, fearful anticipation, overwhelming tension, doubts about reality, threatening others, self-doubt, inability to cope, unsafe behavior, and lack of personal security. A healthy mental state is characterized by eagerness, ardent pursuit, passion, and devotion. Think about your last week or month. How much of the time did you experience anxiety and how much of the time were you able to represent clients zealously and to work at peak performance?

If you feel frequently overwhelmed, select a couple of these strategies to reduce anxiety and increase work performance. You will be a better lawyer and a happier person.

Manage Your Workload

Does the workday get away from you? Between phone calls, conferences, court dates, and personnel issues, do you say to yourself, “Tomorrow, I will do better”? Here are some simple solutions that might work:

Complete the difficult tasks first. Make a “to do” list for each day and cross off the items you have done. This will help you stay on track — and keep you uplifted about the duties you have completed. Be aware of “self talk.” Say to yourself, “I do good work; I strive for excellence and not perfection.” Consider joining a support group or getting professional assistance to help you maintain a positive relationship with yourself. It is also important to take a minute (or 10 minutes) just for you. Go outside, run an errand, call a friend. Have something fun scheduled for today, tomorrow, or the weekend. Don’t be afraid to ask colleagues for help with organizational strategies, technological advice, or support with an issue you are facing.

Manage Your Clients

Do you sometimes wish you could handle clients more efficiently and effectively? Try these solutions and you will:

Keep in frequent contact with clients, even if it’s just to let them know there has been a delay. Call clients early in the morning so that you will be fresh and so that if you are in a hurry, a client won’t keep you. Spell complicated matters out for clients in writing. This will prevent annoying repetition and will head off the complaint, “But nobody told me.” Make sure to delegate; your legal assistant can help you handle clients. If a client is non-compliant with a court request, meet at the client’s location to either obtain cooperation or terminate the client relationship. Never sue for unpaid attorney’s fees. If you have bad news to deliver, meet the client in person if possible. Giving clients choices is invaluable. When they choose the best legal recommendation, which is almost always the case, your client will feel empowered and satisfied.

Managing Your Self

Do you put yourself last? Do clients, cases, staff, and family drain you? Healthy techniques are simple. If you learn to use them, you will experience relief and contentment:

Breathe deeply to relax and steady yourself. Plan ahead for meals and snacks to avoid unhealthy habits and last-minute emergencies. Exercise is still the best medicine — schedule exercise as though it is your most important appointment (be sure to write it down). Plan in a manner that is least likely to result in stress or distress. To help with this, keep one calendar for work and one for your personal life. This technique will help you to achieve work-life balance and reasonable expectations for your busy schedule. Identify time-savers, like delegat-

ing, and time-makers, like working while you are waiting for a reply. Return all your calls at once, so none fall through the cracks. It’s important to have your physical workspace be conducive to serenity. Clear cluttered desks and neatly stack files.

Find a Wellness Plan that Works for You

Support groups can also be an excellent resource for you. These people have been through the problem and found the solution, and will share what works. If these techniques still aren’t working, then consider making a significant change. If you think you are having a problem with drugs or alcohol, get assessed by an expert. Seek professional help from a therapist or psychiatrist. Think about what you do now for self-care. Make a “wellness plan,” including identifying what triggers stress and what helps relieve it. For more information about dealing with anxiety, or for professional help, contact the Texas Lawyers’ Assistance Program at (800)343-8637.

CAMERON VANN

is an attorney with the Texas Lawyers’ Assistance Program. A graduate of the University of Texas, Vann received a Master of Education from the University of Houston and a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the University of Houston.



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