



MY OPINION

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Practicing Law and Wellness

Maryland seemed like a such a sensible place to try a first marathon. The course was described as “an out-and-back with rolling hills.” Because it was my first marathon — and because I hoped to be prepared — I drove the course route beforehand. It looked reasonably flat. I had been training for months for the 26.2-mile race and was convinced I could do this. Unfortunately, I turned around just *before* the base of hills.

On race day, I made it only 18 miles before I quit. As I sat in the ambulance (aka “the meat wagon”) with other dropouts (some of whom had incurred injuries; others of whom, like me, had simply been underprepared), I decided I wasn’t ready to give up. I couldn’t just quit — after all, what would I tell my friends when they asked, “How did you do?” I made my way back to the course and started shuffling. The crowds had thinned and the aid stations were being dismantled, but the remaining spectators cheered me along. Somehow, I persevered and made my way across the finish line. A year later, I ran another marathon. In the years that followed, I would complete 11 more.

The lessons I learned during that first marathon have stayed with me. I failed to recognize that I was unprepared for the challenge I set for myself. I almost failed to recognize the inner strength humans have to overcome adversity.

Legal careers are a lot like marathons. We spend a long time training, but really have no idea what we’re getting ourselves into until we start the race. Once that race starts, there’s enormous pressure

not to show weakness, not to admit defeat. In my 40 years as a lawyer, I’ve known too many people who were afraid to tell others when they were struggling with their law practice or in their personal life. I’ve known too many who have dropped out, unwilling to rely on the assistance of others and unable to gather the fortitude to reenter the race.

For more than 20 years, the Texas Lawyers’ Assistance Program (TLAP) has been helping with the identification, peer intervention, and rehabilitation of any Texas lawyer, judge, or law student whose professional performance is impaired because of substance abuse, dependency, or mental health disorders. Three years ago, State Bar President Martha Dickie worked with TLAP to create a powerful DVD, *Practicing from the Shadows: Depression and the Legal Profession*. The video has been a tremendous success. We know from testimonials that *Practicing from the Shadows* has saved lives and set struggling colleagues on the path to recovery. It has had an impact far beyond the borders of Texas. (If you haven’t had the opportunity to watch the video, you can stream it online at www.texasbar.com/tlap.)

This year, I am excited to be working with TLAP Director Ann Foster and TexasBarCLE Video Production Director Paul Burks on a sequel, *Practicing Law and Wellness: Modern Strategies for the Lawyer Dealing with Anxiety, Addiction, and Depression*. Berry Crowley, well known to Texas lawyers, will chair this major initiative. While *Practicing from the Shadows* focused on depression, the

new video speaks broadly about the pressures affecting lawyers, especially during a period of economic uncertainty. In tough times, lawyers feel more stress. Untreated, this can lead to serious physical and mental health issues with wide-ranging repercussions for lawyers, clients, family, and friends. *Practicing Law and Wellness* offers solutions — what’s available, what we offer, what works. We are hoping to screen the video at all Texas-BarCLE advanced courses. We will make copies available free of charge.

I am pleased to announce that the State Bar is contributing \$250,000 this year to the Pat Sheeran and Michael J. Crowley Memorial Trust. The Trust helps to defray the costs of treatment for impaired lawyers and judges. Please consider making your own contribution to this very worthy cause.

No matter how good of shape you’re in, a marathon is an arduous journey. Fortunately, there are people to help, to staff the aid stations, and to cheer us along. A life in the law is no different. In his classic, “Darkness on the Edge of Town,” Bruce Springsteen wrote:

*Everybody’s got a secret, Sonny.
Something that they just can’t face.
Some folks spend their whole lives trying
to keep it.
They carry it with them every step that
they take.*

If you carry a secret, the State Bar, your friends, and colleagues are ready to help. Let us. The exhilaration of stepping across the finish line is well worth the effort. ☆

Terry