

## Avoiding Burnout: What Fuels Your Fire?

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## Learning Goals

- Recognizing burnout and chronic workplace stress and its impact
- Strategies you can use to effectively manage stress and fuel your fire to head off burn out
- What to do if you have burnout
- How Minnesota's Lawyer Assistance Program can help



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## Burnout

A syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- Reduced professional efficacy (World Health Organization)



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## Stressor vs. Stress

Stressor – anything you see, hear, smell, taste or imagine could do you harm, which activates a stress response in your body.

Stress Response – the neurological and physiological shifts that happen in your body when you encounter a threat.



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## Is Lawyer Stress Different?

- Perfection
- Pessimism
- Isolation & uncertainty
- Vicarious trauma

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## Stress Response

Heart beats faster, blood pressure increases, you breathe more quickly, muscles tense, sensitivity to pain is diminished, you are alert and vigilant, your senses are heightened, and your memory shifts to challenge experience and knowledge relevant to the stressor.

Other organ systems get deprioritized: digestion slows, immune functioning shifts.



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## Chronic Stress→Burnout

Burnout emerges when the demands of the job outstrip a person's ability to cope with the stress. (C. Maslach)

Your body is waiting for some cue that you are safe from threat. Denying, ignoring or suppressing our stress response results in chronically activated stress response. (A & E Nagoski)



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## Distinctive Features

A response to excessive stress at work, characterized by:

- Emotional exhaustion-feelings of being emotionally drained and lacking emotional resources
- Depersonalization- a negative and detached response to other people and loss of idealism
- Personal accomplishment-decline in feelings of competence and performance at work (Maslach)



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## The “Drivers” of Burnout (Maslach)

Mismatch in work dimensions:

- **Workload** – high demands, low resources
- **Control** – lack of choice, discretion
- **Reward** – intrinsic or extrinsic
- **Community** – negative or insufficient human interaction
- **Fairness** – unfair treatment, environment
- **Values** – lacking connection to values



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## Lawyers are at Risk

- Long hours, heavy workload
- Blurred boundaries between work and home
- Working in a helping profession
- Little or no autonomy or control over work
- Perfectionism-high achieving, high responsibility, type-A



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## Signs & Symptoms

- Mentally exhausted
- Sense of failure and self-doubt
- Feeling helpless, trapped, defeated
- Detached
- Difficulty concentrating
- Chronically imbalanced
- Relationship impact
- Loss of motivation
- Increasing cynical and negative outlook
- Decreased satisfaction and sense of accomplishment



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## Physiological Impact

Brain – thinning of the frontal cortex, affecting cognitive functioning, disrupts creativity, problem solving and working memory.

Body – release of cortisol, a stress hormone, into the bloodstream, leading to heart disease, high blood pressure, immune disorders



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## Ethical Impact

Burnout impacts a lawyer's competence, which requires a combination of legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation (MRPC 1.1)

Loss of empathy for our clients and lack of interest in our profession impacts our ability to be zealous advocates or meet the aspirations of the legal profession.



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## Strategies to Head Off Burnout

- Completing the Stress Cycle
- Finding or Restoring Meaning
- Managing Stress through Well-being
- Addressing What's Driving You to Burnout
- Let LCL Help



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## Completing the Stress Cycle

First line of attack – physical activity

- Move! Run, swim, dance, walk
- Anything that moves your body enough to get you breathing deeply
- 20-60 minutes a day – every day

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## Completing the Stress Cycle

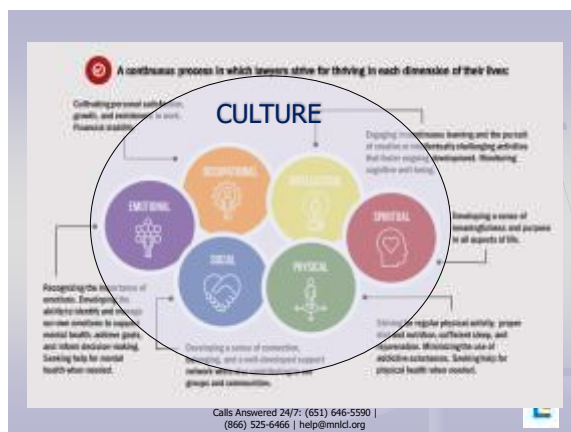
Ways to tell your body you are safe:

- Breathe – deep slow breaths
- Interact – casual social interaction
- Laugh – really laugh
- Love – deeper, loving connections
- Cry - release
- Create – paint, sing, draw, write

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## Meaningfulness

- Work is meaningful when we believe
  - It matters
  - Is valuable
  - Contributes to personal growth/greater good
  - Is a good fit with our values
- Primary motivational force
- Largest contributor to engagement (opposite of burnout)

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## How Meaning Benefits Us

- Better emotional regulation
- Reduced risk of depression and anxiety
- Reduced substance abuse
- Healthy sleep
- Cardiovascular health
- Slower cognitive decline in Alzheimer's patients

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## Building Meaning in Work

- Reframing (job crafting)
  - What is/who is the benefit of our work?
  - How does it fit into the overall picture?
- Positive challenge – pushed but not overwhelmed
- Seek variety
- Seek connection

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## Managing Stress

"High stress is a virtual hallmark of the legal profession and high rates of suicide, chemical dependency, and depression among lawyers demonstrate that managing stress is a challenge for many. Practicing the mental disciplines of mindfulness, acceptance, and personal authenticity offer a way to quell stress and find greater meaning."

Dyan Williams, "The Practice of Being: Mastering Stress & Finding Meaning as a Lawyer" Minn. Bench & Bar 67(3) (March 2010)

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## Wellness Strategies

Wellness strategies won't "cure" burnout but can help moderate stress build-up, prevent chronic stress that causes burnout, and improve daily life.

- Sleep
- Mindfulness
- Yoga
- Meditation

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## Wellness Strategies

### More wellness activities

- Extreme sports
- Book Clubs
- Running Groups
- Cooking Classes
- Playing in a Band

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## Moderating stress buildup



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## Burnout Action Plan

- Identify it: "burning out" / "burnout"
- Talk to Trusted Colleague
- Assess the Mismatch
- Consider workplace options
- Ask for Changes in Work Environment
- Consider Personal Options
- Ask LCL for Help

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## Burnout Action Plan

### Assess the Mismatch Driving Your Burnout

- **Workload**
- **Control**
- **Reward**
- **Community**
- **Fairness**
- **Values**

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## Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers

- **Who We Are:**
  - Minnesota's Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP)
- **Who We Support:**
  - Lawyers, Judges, Law Students, Legal Professionals, and their families
  - Free and 100% Confidential
  - On average, we help approximately 400 new individuals per year.

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## Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers Minnesota's LAP

- **What We Offer:**
  - 24-hour hotline (866-525-6466)
  - Short Term Counseling (up to 4 free sessions per issue)
  - Peer Supports
  - Coaching
  - Support Groups
  - Referral to Community Services
  - Education (CLEs & Law School Outreach)
  - Crisis Intervention
  - Someone to Listen

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## Partnership with The Sand Creek Group

- Up to 4 free counseling sessions
- Resource website
  - [www.sandcreekeap.com](http://www.sandcreekeap.com)
  - Click on "Member Portal & App"
    - When registering use the Company Code "lawyers"
- Contact Sand Creek directly at  
**651-430-3383** or toll-free: **1-888-243-5744**

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## TO CONTACT LCL

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HELP *and*



THERE IS  
HOPE



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