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Holding It All Together: The Emotional Reality of Caregiving While Practicing Law

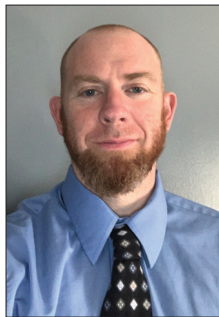


By Jill O'Neill and Mark Durso

Caregiving is a journey that can take many forms. For some, it is a lifelong commitment to a chronically ill or disabled loved one. For others, it is raising children until they become independent. Many step into caregiving temporarily, supporting aging parents through vulnerable stages or in their final days. Regardless of its duration, caregiving requires profound emotional and physical energy, often falling on one or two primary individuals. Caregiver burnout is real, and its impact can be far-reaching.



O'Neill



Durso

For legal professionals, caregiving often exists alongside one of the most demanding careers. The practice of law is defined by tight deadlines, ever-changing client needs, high expectations, and long hours devoted to advocacy. In many ways, caregiving mirrors these same pressures. Parenting and caregiving involve meeting constant deadlines – medical appointments, school obligations, and daily responsibilities – while advocating for a loved one's well-being in educational, medical, and social systems. Both roles require vigilance, emotional investment, and an unwavering sense of responsibility. It can feel nearly impossible to be both a high-functioning legal professional and a present, attentive caregiver, yet many attorneys live at this intersection every day.

Caregiving can also surface complex family dynamics. Old wounds may reopen, resentments may emerge, and unresolved trauma can resurface during moments of vulnerability. Burnout affects not only the caregiver but also relationships, contributing to family conflict, marital strain, and heightened stress. For attorneys already navigating high-stress environments, the cumulative emotional burden can be significant.

Research confirms that caregiving responsibilities are not distributed equally. A 2023 national study by the American Bar Association found that mothers in the legal profession continue to carry a disproportionate share of caregiving duties. Forty-one percent of mothers reported being primarily responsible for helping their children with homework, compared to just 12 percent of fathers. Seventy-one percent of mothers manage children's medical appointments, and 65 percent are responsible for arranging childcare. These findings are not a reflection of fathers' lack of involvement, nor of an underappreciation of the disparities faced by same-sex parents, but rather illustrate persistent structural and societal expectations that place greater caregiving responsibility on women.

These caregiving demands also intersect with career outcomes. Sixty percent of mothers working in law firms reported disparaging or belittling comments about their roles as parents. Similarly, 60 percent reported being viewed as less committed to their careers, and 43 percent indicated they were denied equal access to professional development opportunities. These experiences compound stress, contribute to burnout, and can undermine professional confidence and career advancement.

In addition to parenting responsibilities, many attorneys now find themselves part of what is known as the "sandwich generation" – individuals simultaneously caring for children and aging parents. According to research highlighted by *Best Lawyers*, approximately 23 percent of Americans are balancing both roles. This dual responsibility creates a layered emotional experience, as caregivers manage both the

growth of one generation and the decline of another. The emotional toll of witnessing aging, illness, and dependency – while continuing to meet professional obligations – can lead to compassion fatigue, traumatic stress, and emotional exhaustion.

Caregiving often involves grief – grieving the life you imagined, mourning the loss of personal freedom, and witnessing the gradual decline of someone you love. This grief is often invisible yet deeply felt. Legal professionals, who are trained to rely on logic, analysis, and problem-solving, may find themselves unprepared for the emotional complexity of personal caregiving. Professional detachment, which serves attorneys well in their work, cannot fully protect them from the emotional vulnerability of caring for loved ones.

While caregiving is an act of selfless love, caregivers must recognize the importance of caring for themselves. Even small moments of rest and connection can restore emotional balance. Feeling seen, appreciated, and supported is essential, particularly because caregiving can be profoundly isolating. Emotional suppression may allow caregivers to continue functioning in the short term, but over time it can contribute to anxiety, depression, physical health issues, and burnout.

Caregiving is one of the most honorable gifts we can offer. Yet the gift is not defined solely by the tasks we perform. It is found in presence – in shared stories, quiet conversations, and meaningful connection. Too often, caregivers focus entirely on responsibilities and unintentionally miss opportunities for emotional closeness. Perspective matters. It is not only about what we do, but how we do it.

Caregiving is humbling, and it is not meant to be undertaken alone. Support does not simply mean additional help with tasks; it also means allowing yourself to receive emotional support. Many caregivers struggle with guilt, resentment, or self-criticism. These feelings do not reflect failure. They reflect the profound emotional complexity of loving and caring for another person while managing your own life and identity.

Despite the challenges and disparities highlighted by research, there are meaningful opportunities for change. Law firms and legal organizations can foster healthier environments by normalizing caregiving responsibilities, promoting flexible work arrangements, ensuring equal access to advancement opportunities, and cultivating cultures of empathy and support. Equally important, caregivers themselves can prioritize emotional wellness, seek connection, and recognize that needing support is not weakness – it is part of sustaining resilience.

Caregivers are not failing. They are navigating the simultaneous realities of love and grief, responsibility and vulnerability, strength and exhaustion.

The New Hampshire Lawyers Assistance Program is here to support members of the legal community who are navigating caregiving challenges. We provide a confidential listening ear, connect you with caregiver and mental health resources, and offer a space where your experiences are understood without judgment. Caregiving may be one of the most difficult journeys you undertake, but you do not have to walk it alone. ☺

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Jill O'Neill is the executive director of the New Hampshire Lawyers Assistance Program (NHLAP) and serves on the New Hampshire Bar Association's Special Committee on Attorney Wellness. Mark Durso is the NHLAP director of wellness.

Imposter Syndrome: Friend or Foe?



By Coda Campbell

The definition of “imposter syndrome” varies from person to person. It is generally a paradox involving intelligence, success, and competence mixed with feelings of self-doubt, fraudulence, and anxiety. “Do I know enough?” “Am I good enough?” “Why was I chosen for this opportunity over others?” “Am I going to drop the ball and ruin someone’s life?”

I opened my solo practice six days after graduating from law school. I had an abundance of imposter syndrome. For me, my biggest fear was the unknown. There are so many things I learned from mentors that I otherwise would have learned the hard way. To quell my insecurities, I read the New Hampshire Rules of Professional Conduct and Court Rules daily. I read the text of the law for every case, and for military matters I read the applicable military regulations cover to cover. I still do.

My imposter syndrome was overwhelming at first, so I asked my mentors when I could expect it to go away. To my consternation, I learned that it never goes away for the best attorneys. You learn to embrace it. They were right. Over these past three years, my confidence has increased, but the imposter syndrome persists. I called on my mentors and friends for input for this article. I hope the words of these attorneys bring readers of all levels the same reassurance they have brought me. If you have imposter syndrome, you are in good company.

Courtney Brooks

UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law

“The more I started sharing that I had imposter syndrome, the more I learned others feel that way. I think just naming it out loud is important.”

Melissa Davis

UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law

“I think it really comes from wanting our clients to have the best representation possible. I’m always wondering, how would someone more experienced than me do this? Would they do it better than me? Is my client suffering because they don’t have the most experienced attorney alive? What will the client, the judge, or my opponent think about my performance? What if I miss something (a case, an argument, a line of cross-examination) and my client suffers? Will this ever get easier?”

Twenty years later, this is still what goes through my head. I know the answer is yes – it does get easier – but it doesn’t completely go away. I try to remind myself that I know my client and their case better than anyone. No one is in a better position than I am to do what needs to be done. I am still inspired by others (more and less experienced) and I ask questions, but after that, I just have to trust myself or at least fake it ‘til I make it.”



Ted Lothstein
Lothstein Guerriero, PLLC

“One thing that others might overlook is the impact of how quickly the profession is changing due to technology. You are postulating that older, more experienced lawyers are less likely to have imposter syndrome. But when it comes to rapid changes in technology and how law is practiced, I have to think that the inverse is true – the more experienced the lawyer, the more they will feel a stranger in a strange world if told that they have to adapt to new technologies, particularly AI tools, or perish. I certainly feel it.

We have to remember that there is a spectrum here. At one end is imposter syndrome. At the other end is arrogance. Imposter syndrome leads to feelings of anxiety and vulnerability. Arrogance leads to career-destroying mistakes and many, many smaller errors that harm clients. It’s very hard to find a comfortable position in the middle of these extremes, if one even exists. But it’s easier to lean toward imposter syndrome, which is much less likely to harm clients or the firm or organization you are working for compared to arrogance.”

Robin D. Melone
Pastori | Krans, PLLC

“The difference between earnest self-reflection and imposter syndrome is trusting yourself and being humble enough to know when someone else is right. I think it is essential that we honestly consider all feedback (both positive and negative) and that we never stop learning or growing. But I think it is equally important that we not ignore our own experiences, knowledge, and instincts in deference to someone else. The latter is where imposter syndrome shows up for me.

I’ve been a lawyer for over 20 years, and I still second-guess myself (which is good). I want to know that I’ve considered all angles of an issue. Find the colleagues you trust and bounce things off them. Hubris is the currency of avoidable and life-changing errors.”

Tony Naro
Naro Law, PLLC

“Imposter syndrome never really goes away in this profession, and that may not be a flaw. The moment you stop questioning yourself entirely is often the moment you stop being careful, curious, or ethical. I don’t know if I think of it as ‘imposter syndrome’ so much as the natural anxiety of legal practice. It doesn’t go away.” ☺

Coda Campbell is a solo practitioner at Campbell Law, PLLC. She practices military law and veterans’ benefits law globally (VA accredited). She also handles criminal defense and administrative law cases in New Hampshire and Florida. Coda is serving her third term on the NHBA’s Special Committee on Attorney Wellness. She can be reached at codacampbelllaw.com or (603) 456-9709.

The Power of Awe: A Walk Outside Can Change Your Day

By Deirdre Salsich

Many articles have recently extolled the benefits of spending time in nature, particularly moments that inspire awe. Awe is that unique experience of realizing that you are just one small part of a much larger universe.

If that sounds like hoey, you might be forgetting the last time you took a walk at sunset, when the afternoon light becomes a gradient of oranges, pinks, and blues as the sun descends in the sky. Or the last time you walked on a beach, one little speck among trillions of grains of sand, small against the whoosh of the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Or the last time you summited a mountain, marveling at the literal and figurative heights you have reached from your own efforts, looking out at a gorgeous vista of greens, blues, and grays in those granite-flecked mountains.

That experience of awe is something that can happen on any ordinary day if you make a bit of time for it. Studies show that when we leave the confines of a desk, fluorescent lighting, and paneled ceilings for a walk in nature, our bodies become calmer and more regulated. Blood pressure levels out. The unmistakable tug of work is distant as we take time for ourselves to breathe fresh air, feel the actual earth beneath our feet, and bathe in the natural sunlight as we were meant to.

Dog owners know the benefits, of course, of their dog's companionship, but your daily walk with your pup also gives you the opportunity to drink in your surroundings. The nice thing about the benefits of nature and awe is that there is no set time commitment needed to experience awe. It can happen on a short 15-minute walk to the corner store or on the aforementioned dog walk.

As the days slowly but surely get longer and we edge toward spring and summer, finding even 15 minutes per day for a walk outside will give you more opportunities for awe, for vitamin D from sunlight, and for rest. Yes, being in nature is rest for your mind and your nervous system, and it can also help regulate sleep. The brain needs cues from sunlight to know when to wind down for the night, and taking your daily walk outdoors can go a long way toward helping you reach your sleep goals.

Even taking a walk during lunch can help reset feelings of stress, panic, or overwork. Before the Industrial Revolution, most people worked outdoors, and our bodies and brains developed and benefited from those hours spent in natural light. While I am grateful for a warm indoor office during the winter months, nothing beats a bit of time in nature to recharge. Longer jaunts are easier to attain here in New Hampshire than in urban areas. One only needs to jump in the car, drive to a trail or any of the numerous state parks, and choose a short hike to lose yourself in the beauty of nature. The work will always be there, but there's nothing quite like capturing a bit of nature to recharge. ☼

Deirdre Salsich is an experienced labor and employment lawyer with additional industry experience in higher education, healthcare, government, and nonprofit organizations. She is a member of the NHBA's Special Committee on Attorney Wellness.



Winant Park in Concord on January 1, 2026. Photo by Deirdre Salsich

Adventure Before Dementia

By Paul Chant

I had the pleasure of traveling for five weeks over the past couple of months to Tasmania, the Melbourne area of Australia, and the South Island of New Zealand.

A lovely gentleman we met on an all-day wine tour in the Marlborough sauvignon blanc district of New Zealand coined the phrase "adventure before dementia."

He and his wife had retired at 58, sold their home, and set out on their new sailboat, which became their home for the next eight years – from winters in the Bahamas to cruising the coast of Maine in July and August. After eight years, they bought a house outside of Hilton Head. Now, at 75, they see the value of a nest and close friends.

I know too many lawyers who work past normal retirement ages. I have seen too many die shortly after they stopped practicing. They, like me, really enjoyed helping their clients through difficult situations. They liked their incomes, as well as their personal status in their communities.

While my wife and I enjoyed seeing, learning, and experiencing new things, the following happened at home: a good friend of my wife moved to hospice during her long-time fight with cancer, a second good friend experienced a recurrence of his colorectal cancer, a third friend was diagnosed with stage four ovarian



cancer, and one of my sisters was diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer. I have a good friend, the same age as me, now institutionalized and non-verbal with Alzheimer's.

I sit here today writing this column on the second anniversary of my brother's tragic kayaking death.

This trip naturally forced me to consider my position in life. I had already planned to go of counsel to my firm later this year. But now I ask: Do I want to be of counsel for the next three to four years or not, since I am 66? I have the means to retire.

My heart is pulling me to get out fully sooner rather than later. There is too much to be experienced on this planet. There are too many places I want to see. I want to spend more time in Denver with the three grandchildren I have there.

I hate to preach. That is not my intention. My intention is to encourage each of you to evaluate where you are in your lives and careers. As we were instructed as youths before crossing the road: Stop, look, and listen. Our futures in life and adventure are not guaranteed. Take time to reflect on where you are. Make a plan. Utilize a financial advisor. Make your path the best one it can be for yourself and your family. Don't wait too long to take the time to fill your life with adventure.

Be well. ☼

Paul Chant is a former NHBA president and serves on the NHBA's Special Committee on Attorney Wellness.

My Story of Depression



By Jonathan M. Dunitz

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So here we are. After 28 years, it is time to dispel a myth related to my law career. According to this self-perpetuated myth, in the summer of 1996 I quit the full-time practice of law and started my own practice as an independent contract legal researcher and writer so that I could follow my passion as a musician. I joined a local funk band, Petting Zoo, and began touring Maine and New England playing my trumpet. It is true that I left practicing law full-time. I did, in fact, start my own business as an independent contractor doing research and writing. The band is no lie. To be honest, it was a lot of fun. But the reality is far more complex.



In truth, joining a band was a well-timed accident, not the reason for leaving full-time practice. At that time, I was suffering from debilitating depression. I was at times literally immobilized, often anxiety-ridden, and, on rare occasions, a potential danger to myself. In my depressed brain, my legal career was over. I started my research and writing practice solely to have an income to pay rent, student loans, and other monthly bills while I figured out a new career. Some folks wait tables while trying to make it in the arts; I was practicing law in two areas where I had the skills – research and writing – while trying to find a new career. Don't get me wrong. I love the law, and love being a lawyer, but was positive that a clinical depression diagnosis was the death knell for a law career.

For the next seven years, I thought I was working through my depression. There were definitely ups and downs, but by 2003, things seemed good and I thought I was ready to get back to law firm life. At that point, my old firm needed someone to do contract research and writing, so I took on that role, and in 2004 rejoined the firm as an associate. As time progressed, I was feeling good, more like my old self. I was practicing law at a high level, feeling well, showing everyone that I was healthy. The problem was that I thought I was “cured.” I weaned off antidepressants in 2005 and then ignored the warning signs. That is, until December 2005 when I could not ignore them anymore.

At that point, I had no choice but to do something I had consciously avoided for nine years. It was a decision I had rejected for nearly a decade because I had convinced myself that it would end my legal career and possibly any chance of gainful employment. With a good friend talking me through it, I drove to Maine Medical Center and checked myself in. After a day in the Maine Medical Center ER, I was taken to Spring Harbor Hospital. During a week of inpatient counseling, learning how to use cognitive behavioral therapy, and other activities designed to teach one how to live and thrive with depression, I realized all was not lost. They reminded me of the things that I enjoy doing, what makes me tick, and encouraged me to find that balance. After that week, I realized that my brain still worked. I saw things more clearly than I had in years. Nobody took my birthday away. Most importantly, nobody reduced my law license to ashes. I learned that, like many other medical conditions, my depression and the medication that kept it at bay was a lifelong commitment, no matter how well I felt.

So why the myth about leaving law to be a musician? Why tell people I took a hiatus from law to be frivolous and play in a band? Because society – and, it seems, the legal profession in particular – attaches an irrational stigma to mental illness and substance use disorders. Lawyers cannot be depressed. They cannot have anxiety. They must thrive on stress, not be crushed by it. Indeed, the successful lawyers I knew were high performers with no apparent health issues. I now know that the

statistics say otherwise. Indeed, it is likely that I knew many people, even the high performers, who suffered from debilitating health issues, but they, too, hid them.

To the extent I knew of lawyers with mental health issues, the stigma suggested they were not cut out to practice law and many of them had left the practice. After all, lawyers are essentially selling our brainpower. We do not make widgets. We do not build houses. We do not make anything. We use our brains to solve problems for our clients. In my mind, my brain was broken, and my career was over. Even as I recovered, I continued to believe in that stigma – if people knew I suffered from mental illness they would not want me to be their lawyer. So, until recently, I continued to live in silence with my depression.

As I reflect on my experience, I realize that the stigma was as much in my head as it was a societal stigma. People care about the work I do, the analysis of legal issues, the arguments in court, the negotiations in mediation, the solutions to thorny legal issues. The fact that I take an antidepressant every morning is no more relevant than if I needed to take a statin or insulin. So, if you are reading this and suffering in silence, please understand that you are not alone. Know that your health is the most important thing, that you can get well, and you can successfully practice law. Reach out to others, call the [New Hampshire Lawyers Assistance Program], call a hotline, call me. We need you, your clients need you, and your community needs you.

If you are reading this and know a colleague who is suffering, support them and help them understand they remain an important part of the team. One of the keys to my recovery was that while I stigmatized myself, my firm did not, and they deserve much credit for me surviving and thriving. Martha Gaythwaite visited me in the hospital daily and encouraged me to get better and come back to the office when I was ready. She is the one who told me that taking my meds was like any other chronic illness that required medication. To not be embarrassed because I need to take the meds. Magistrate Judge Karen Wolf saw me at my worst – the first night in the hospital. She let me know that the firm valued me and was concerned for my well-being.

When I returned to the office, she kept me on her major cases so that I would understand that I could still be a valuable member of the team. Judge Wolf also got me involved in pro bono work because she knew that helping others in need would help my own wellbeing. The late Harold Friedman, who is sorely missed, always helped me get back up off the canvas. Larry Leavitt had me leading the damages defenses on some of the most complicated and significant commercial matters of my career. The example they set is an important one.

Please follow that example and support your attorneys and staff suffering from depression, anxiety, stress, and substance use issues. Show them that they can and will come back from what they surely believe are life-altering or career-ending events.

Finally, when I started publicly telling my story, people thanked me and told me it was brave to do so. The fact that people view it as brave tells you everything about the stigma. It should not be an act of bravery to get help when you need help or to tell others why you have not been yourself of late. Hopefully, this is the start of something new, a paradigm where discussing mental health and substance use will no longer be viewed as brave, but as just another illness.

While there is a growing awareness of these issues today and more understanding that treatment, support, and empathy can put attorneys back on a successful path, there are still roadblocks. To remove those roadblocks, we, as a Bar, need to eliminate the stigmas. It is the right thing to do, and it makes for better, healthier, more productive lawyers.

Jonathan M. Dunitz is counsel at Verrill Law. His law practice is comprised of energy, utilities, and communications; food and beverage law; insurance coverage and litigation; commercial litigation; appeals; and mediation. Jonathan can be reached at jdunitz@verrill-law.com.

In-Person Events: You Can Hate Them but Do It Anyway

By Kathleen Davidson

New Hampshire used to be known for its friendly and welcoming Bar, but according to many reports, things are changing – and not for the better. This change started occurring after people returned to working in person following the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the social aspects of the New Hampshire Bar died during the pandemic and have not been revived.

For example, the Manchester Bar Association used to be a vibrant and lively group that met monthly for dinners. As the former president, I was unable to bring it back to life after the pandemic – though rumor has it that a group is trying to give it another go.



I'm also the chair of the NHBA's Labor and Employment Law Section, and we have struggled to get in-person attendance at events, though numbers are trending upward! I was starting to think it was me, but speaking with my peers, most organizations are struggling with the same issue.

The annual New Hampshire Association for Justice Family Law Forum used to be like a reunion. This year, there were more in-person attendees than last year, but still far more online participants overall.

Our lives are busy and family and work commitments abound. It's easy to say that extracurricular or in-person events are unnecessary and not make time for them. However, as counterintuitive as it is, even if you hate going to in-person events, attending will likely benefit your wellness in the long run.

You may be surprised to know that I'm an introvert at heart. It's *work* for me to attend in-person events, particularly if there is a remote option. However, every time I go to an in-person event, I'm glad that I did.

The practice of law can at times feel very isolating, especially in smaller firms or solo practices where daily interaction with colleagues is limited. Many practice areas involve emotionally complex cases that can heighten pressure and responsibility. When an attorney walks into a courtroom and does not know opposing counsel or the judge on the bench, there is an added layer of uncertainty that can make even routine matters feel more stressful. Unfamiliarity creates unpredictability, and unpredictability often leads to unnecessary tension.

Professional familiarity changes that experience in many meaningful ways. When I have attended a CLE with someone, participated in a section meeting, or spoken briefly with another attorney at a county Bar event, even the next interaction feels different because there is already a level of recognition.

I may not know the person well, but I have some context for how they communicate and approach their work. That familiarity creates a more grounded and predictable environment. Court becomes less intimidating when I walk in, recognize the people in the room, and feel a sense of professional connection rather than complete unfamiliarity.

Clearer expectations reduce anxiety and allow me to focus more fully on the substance of the case rather than the uncertainty of what the interaction may be like.

This familiarity does not eliminate disagreement or conflict, especially in prac-

tice areas where emotions can run high. However, prior professional interaction often creates a more respectful tone and makes any communication more efficient. When attorneys recognize one another from outside the courtroom, discussions tend to be more focused on problem-solving rather than posturing. To be blunt, it's harder to be a jerk when you either just saw opposing counsel in person or know you will see them again soon.

In-person events also provide access to professional support systems that can significantly reduce stress. Every attorney encounters unfamiliar procedural issues or complex fact patterns at some point in their career. Navigating those challenges entirely alone increases pressure and uncertainty. Knowing other attorneys in your practice area lets you reach out to someone for guidance. A brief phone call or conversation with someone I have already met can provide reassurance, perspective, and practical solutions.

Isolation tends to raise stress levels, whereas connection typically helps reduce it. Virtual programs offer convenience and flexibility, but they do not fully replicate the benefits of face-to-face interaction. Informal conversations before or after live CLE programs often yield valuable insights not included in written materials. Section meetings provide opportunities to exchange ideas and discuss shared challenges in a practice area.

These interactions help build trust, strengthen relationships, and create a greater sense of community within the profession. Even if you have a busy practice and do not need more referral sources, you will still benefit from getting to know your peers. Attending even a small number of these events throughout the year can create meaningful relationships that improve day-to-day practice.

For someone who does not naturally gravitate toward large gatherings, attending in-person events may feel very uncomfortable at first. It may seem easier to stay home or participate virtually. However, the short-term discomfort of showing up often leads to long-term professional ease. Familiar faces reduce tension, predictable interactions help lower stress, and professional relationships create a more supportive work environment.

Wellness in the legal profession is often discussed in terms of time management, workload balance, and personal boundaries. While those factors are important, professional connections also play a significant role in reducing stress. When interactions are grounded in familiarity rather than uncertainty, everyday challenges feel more manageable and less overwhelming.

Sometimes the very thing I am most inclined to avoid turns out to be the thing that helps me the most. For that reason, when attending in-person events feels uncomfortable or inconvenient, I remind myself to do it anyway.

Taking time to connect outside the courtroom will strengthen our professional community and make the practice of law feel less isolating, more collaborative, and hopefully return us to the collegial Bar for which we were once known. You may hate it – but you should do it anyway. ☺

Kathleen Davidson is a partner and the chair of the family law practice at Pastori|Krans in Concord. Kathleen's practice focuses on family law and employment law, including conduct of workplace investigations. She serves on the NHBA's Special Committee on Attorney Wellness and can be reached at kdauidson@pastorikrans.com.

Using AirPods as Hearing Aids

By Kathleen Davidson

You may have noticed a colleague wearing AirPods (Apple's wireless headphones) at an unusual moment. You may have wondered if they are trying to take a call or listen to music in a meeting. If you attended the New Hampshire Association for Justice's Annual Family Law Forum in February, you may have noticed that I was wearing AirPods. I wasn't being rude or distracting myself from the speaker. I was trying to hear the speaker!

AirPods Pro 2 and 3 are equipped with software that, when paired with an up-to-date Apple device, functions as a clinical-grade hearing aid. The iPhone software even includes a hearing test to identify your hearing needs. Then, when your AirPods are in transparency mode, with the hearing-aid function turned on, it enhances your hearing. It also offers options such as reducing ambient noise so you can better hear a speaker or reducing noises farther away so you can hear the person next to you in a loud restaurant.

For people with low-to-moderate hearing loss that may not yet be severe enough for full hearing aids, or for someone who just forgot their hearing aids, AirPods can be a helpful tool for amplifying sound. Although AirPods are not a permanent substitute for traditional hearing aids, they offer a helpful temporary bridge between technology and accessibility. I will likely need real hearing aids soon, but in the meantime, if you see me in a meeting with AirPods in, I'm just trying to hear you better! ☺

What Is Sustainable Lawyering?

By Kara Simard

We all have our own ideas about what well-being in legal practice means. Some see it narrowly, and some view it broadly. The 2017 *National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being Report* defined lawyer well-being in broad terms as “a continuous process whereby lawyers seek to thrive in each of the following areas: emotional health, occupational pursuits, creative or intellectual endeavors, sense of spirituality or greater purpose in life, physical health, and social connections with others.”

The report went on to state that “[l]awyer well-being is part of a lawyer’s ethical duty of competence. It includes lawyers’ ability to make healthy, positive work/life choices to assure not only a quality of life within their families and communities, but also to help them make responsible decisions for their clients. It includes maintaining their own long-term well-being.”

Sustainable lawyering evolves from this definition by recognizing that well-being is all-encompassing (more than just self-care or work-life balance) as noted by the Task Force Report, and further requires not only an ongoing commitment but also connection to our values.

The way I define sustainable lawyering is maintaining the ability to remain in the legal profession for the long term, without compromising ethical standards, considering the long-term consequences of actions, recognizing the interconnectedness of values and satisfaction in the profession, managing stress, and nurturing well-being. Sustainable lawyering is more than just caring for ourselves; it is about flourishing and succeeding as lawyers.

We are rooted in our life experiences, backgrounds, and personal histories. We carry these identities with us through our work, and they help shape our values as people and as lawyers. Our values are our guiding principles. They guide our decisions and motivate us in the work we do.

We should consider our values when setting goals and benchmarks to achieve at various stages in our careers. We should strive for work we are passionate about – work that is meaningful and gives us purpose.

Among our values, goals, and meaningful work are the interconnected personal and work-related factors that must be nourished to maintain well-being and to sustain throughout our careers.

Sustainable lawyering demands intentional commitment along with planning and strategy. It is personal to each of us. It requires self-awareness, reflection, and follow-through. It is an ongoing process that never ends. And it continuously evolves as our own circumstances change or as our values shift.

Personal and work-related factors need to be considered, managed, and nurtured in the short term, while also keeping an eye on the big picture with future-oriented thinking. Managing work-related factors includes managing the basic parts of our jobs like our workplaces, practice areas, overall workload, deadlines, colleagues and workplace relationships, as well as organizational culture and leadership.

Also included are the parts of our work that require intention and planning, such as setting boundaries and understanding expectations, managing time, creating opportunities for professional development and growth, seeking mentors and sponsors,



developing client relationships, training staff, business development, pivoting career focus as needed, and attaining competence and expertise.

Relationships with colleagues and other professionals in the legal community are a significant aspect of sustainability. These relationships and social connections aid in our development as attorneys and provide companionship, emotional support, feedback, and informational or instrumental support. Strong professional relationships are a necessary foundation when navigating the never-ending challenges in a legal career.

We must also nurture social connections with family, friends, and our communities. These solid relationships outside of work provide similar benefits, carry us through non-work-related life challenges, and can improve our compassion, empathy, and understanding of the struggles our clients face.

Engaging in creative and intellectual endeavors such as personal hobbies or expanding our knowledge and skills outside of law fulfill us beyond work, but I wholeheartedly believe these pursuits also create better lawyers. They make us well-rounded, give us something to look forward to, and help take our minds off our stressful jobs. Anticipatory pleasure from thinking about a creative weekend project, an upcoming adventure, or the interesting book you are reading may improve your present mindset and get you through the tough days.

Physical and emotional health are most typically associated with well-being for good reasons; we cannot do our jobs without our health. A significant aspect of our health as lawyers is managing and coping with stress, emotionally recharging, and being aware of how we are feeling, what we need, and what we can control.

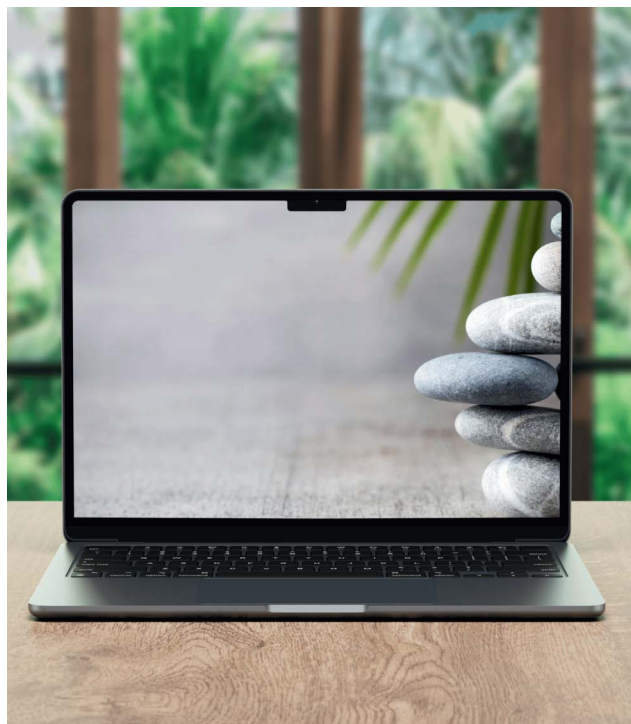
Cognitive performance is probably our greatest asset as lawyers. Without our health and ability to manage stress, our concentration, decision-making, memory, self-regulation, problem-solving, and judgment suffer. To flourish, we need to care for every aspect of our health.

Tending to work-related factors, relationships, creative pursuits, and our health will contribute to sustaining in the long term, but we cannot forget the importance of ensuring that our actions and decisions align with our values. Misalignment between our values and behaviors may diminish emotional health, cause disengagement, and potentially lead to burnout. The day-to-day work sometimes puts us in survival mode – functioning on autopilot.

When this happens, we may unknowingly disconnect from our values. Living and working in alignment with our values requires self-reflection and self-awareness to ensure we are setting meaningful, intrinsic goals that motivate us, give us purpose, provide satisfaction, and improve overall well-being. Sustainable lawyering mandates this broad, comprehensive view of what it means to be a healthy and happy lawyer.

Taking an expansive perspective, making an intentional commitment, and regularly reflecting and evaluating will hopefully lead to improved performance, ethical practice, and a long, healthy, satisfying career in law. ☺

Kara Simard is an assistant clinical professor and the director of legal residencies at the University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law. Prior to that, she represented indigent criminal defendants at the New Hampshire Public Defender. She is serving her first term on the NHBA’s Special Committee on Attorney Wellness. She can be reached at kara.simard@law.unh.edu or (603) 513-5195.



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NH Lawyers Assistance Program
lapnh.org

Institute for Well-Being in Law
lawyerwellbeing.net

Lawyers Depression Project
lawyersdepressionproject.org

**National Alliance for Mental
Illness New Hampshire**
naminh.org

ABA Well-Being in the Legal Profession
americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/well-being-in-the-legal-profession/

The Happy Lawyer Project
thehappylawyerproject.com

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