

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It is Hard to Ask for Help, and Even Harder to Offer It

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I have sought professional counseling three times during my career. Each time was the result of someone asking if I was OK. In retrospect, seeking counseling seems like such an easy step to take, but at the time, I did not see it as an option or a solution. It was only when someone close to me took the time to check in with me and offered to help that I thought it might be worth the time.

Being an attorney is hard – rewarding – but hard. Despite the significant autonomy that a legal career provides, once you step into the role of representing a client – deadlines, demands, and responsibilities, professional and legal – come into the mix. At the same time, personal and community obligations that were present before accepting client representation are still present. The combination can be invigorating, exhilarating and, with no warning, devastating. If you find yourself in this third position, it is hard to ask for help.

If, unlike me, you are aware that you need help, ask for it. The State Bar of Nevada can assist. One phone call, text, or email to Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (1-866-828-0022 or see link on the state bar's website – www.nvbar.org) or one phone call, text, or email to the Nevada Lawyer Assistance Program (NLAP) (1-866-828-0022 or see link at www.nvbar.org) is all you need to do.

Since 2020, your bar dues pay for therapy benefits. The inquiry, referral, and first three sessions are free and

entirely confidential. (1-866-828-0022 or see link at www.nvbar.org). Finally, there are weekly closed-door meetings in Las Vegas to discuss with other attorneys the issues that are causing stress and anxiety (call 1-866-828-0022 or visit the state bar's website at www.nvbar.org).

If you are a member who thinks a colleague needs help, offer it. Offering help sounds so easy, particularly given our profession. It is surprising, then, how infrequently this occurs. In conversations with friends, colleagues, and judges asking why this is so, the answers range from not wanting to stick your nose into someone else's business or being worried that it might adversely affect a relationship, to not knowing how to broach the subject. On the first issue, that of not wanting to stick your nose into someone else's business, consider that Rule 8.3 of the Nevada Rules of Professional Conduct requires each of us to report a lawyer who has committed a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct that raises a substantial question as to that lawyer's fitness as a lawyer. The need to comply with this rule is required if we are to protect the public and comply with the oath we took when we were sworn into the bar.

But why wait until things get to this level? If you believe that a colleague may have an addiction issue or if they seem to be struggling to meet court deadlines or other commitments, check in with them. Years ago, when I was concerned that a good friend was having issues, I waited a long time to say anything. My hesitancy to check

in was generated by not knowing what to say. Again, the state bar was there to help. I placed one phone call to NLAP Director Kristine Kuzemka who helped me think through how to approach the topic. When Kuzemka asked me what I was afraid of, I told her that I did not want to lose the friendship. She warned me that this might, indeed, be the result. But if you saw a friend drowning and you had an opportunity to save them, even if they would be mad at you for doing so, wouldn't you take that opportunity?

It is the same, absolutely the same, analysis when deciding to check in on someone who appears to be having issues—mental, emotional, or physical. There are many ways to do this, from a simple, "Are you OK?" to a report to the state bar. If you don't know how to broach the subject, call Kuzemka at 1-866-828-0022. There is also a wonderful information campaign entitled "Seize the Awkward" that shows a variety of ways to just check in. Check them out at <https://seizetheawkward.org/> or on YouTube.

If you are struggling with work/life balance; substance abuse; or just feeling anxious, hopeless, or adrift; ask for help. It's hard, but you can do it. If you have a friend or colleague who seems to be struggling in the same way, offer to help. It is also hard, but you can do it. For my part, I say thank you to the family member and colleague who was willing to run the risk of endangering our relationship and offered to help me.