

Young Lawyers Discuss Mental Health at Annual Bar Conference

BY NEVADA LAWYER STAFF

Mental health concerns are the main issues affecting young lawyers in Nevada and students at the William S. Boyd Law School, according to recent surveys of both audiences.

Young lawyers Caleb Green and Alex Velto and Boyd student Erica Smolyar presented their surveys about the mental health of law students and young lawyers during the annual Bar Conference at the Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego.

The Nevada Young Lawyers Survey, which targeted Nevada attorneys between the ages of 21-41, had 105 responses. Of those responses, most young attorneys said the struggle with mental health was their most pressing challenge.

“This survey had some very interesting results,” Velto said. “The result that stuck out to me the most was how many young attorneys struggle with mental health and feel as though they are not heard. The comments from young lawyers, as well as the survey showing the number who

are currently seeking help, painted a vivid picture. I expected most young lawyers to care more about income and job security. But most young lawyers cared immensely about their mental health.”

Many of those surveyed said they’d like to see their firms offer some supporting mental health programs with 27.2 percent citing that they were currently seeing a mental health professional while 31.1 percent said they had sought counseling before.

One of the anonymous commenters said: “I wish my employer were not so judgmental about mental health issues. Although I would feel comfortable confiding in some co-workers, there is no way I would want to tell my employer about my mental health concerns or that I see a therapist. I think I would be judged as weak and someone who can’t hack it.”

Other commenters talked about the stigma attached with seeking out a therapist, while one said it was too much trouble to find someone to work with.

The young lawyers who did reach out for help go to their firm’s health insurance provider (83.2 percent), the State Bar of Nevada (58.9 percent), and their employer (30.5 percent). Almost 10 percent said they were unaware of how to seek help.

The state bar offers a therapy benefit through the Nevada Lawyer Assistance Program (NLAP) that provides three free counseling sessions and is completely confidential. The contact number is 1-866-828-0022. NLAP also offers clinical services for attorneys suffering from abuse, addiction, and/or mental health issues that may impair professional competence, and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, a confidential peer support for Nevada attorneys in need of support to get in – or stay – in recovery.

NLAP Director Kristine Kuzemka also leads weekly virtual meetings for stress and anxiety. The group meets

at 5:30 p.m. every Tuesday via Zoom. Call 866-828-0022 for more information.

According to the law school student survey presented by Smolyar, there is a high level of problematic drinking among students.

On ways that firms can help young lawyers deal with mental health issues, one commenter said the firms can provide mental health days and breaks.

Some of the work stressors mentioned by the respondents included an unrealistic expectation of billable hours, partners do not value family time, do not feel respected in the workplace, vicarious trauma, a constant workload with little to no oversight, and supervising attorneys expecting young attorneys to know how to do everything or figure it out for themselves.

More than 65 percent of respondents said exercise was one of the ways that young lawyers deal with the stress of their livelihood, and Velto said some firms are adding their own gyms. Hobbies and taking care of pets were the other popular methods of dealing with stress.

Some respondents asked for networking events that don’t revolve around happy hours. Velto said that was something he was going to discuss with the Young Lawyers Section when it plans networking events for members.

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