



►► WOULD YOU HIDE THE TRUE ANSWER IF A COWORKER ASKED ABOUT YOUR INJURED ANKLE? SO, WHY SHOULD WE HIDE THE TRUE ANSWER IF A COWORKER ASKS HOW WE'RE DOING?



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How Are You?

Mental well-being, everyday conversations, and achieving your best practice.

MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA. EVERYONE

has gone or will go through a difficult time during his or her career. Cleveland Cavaliers basketball player Kevin Love became a spokesperson for anxiety when he had a very public panic attack during an NBA season game in November 2018. His honesty and compassion put a spotlight on mental health stigma, which the legal community continues to battle on a daily basis.

Clients depend on us to help them navigate the legal system. The weight of making decisions and holding a client's fate in your hands lend themselves to increasing pressure. Lawyers excel at making arguments. But they also can struggle to express and open up about their state of mind.

Modern vernacular has left us with socially acceptable default answers to the omnipresent office question: "How are you?" The expected answer masks or minimizes an opportunity to naturally fold our mental well-being into our conversations.

Would you hide the true answer if a coworker asked about your injured ankle? So, why should we hide the true answer if a coworker asks how we're doing?

No, we should not bring our mental state into every conversation—no one has that kind of emotional energy. Maintaining professionalism also is important. But, yes, we can make a judgment call and gauge whether being honest about our mental state is appropriate for a particular conversation. Love was pushed to speak out after a very public panic attack. A public figure with a rock-star career earning more than \$20 million a year and at the top of his game, Love did not have the opportunity to reflect on

his mental state before his public breakdown on live television. Although attorneys do not work in pressure-filled basketball courts, our own legal courts present plenty of high-pressured moments.

The vast power of stigma stifles, belittles, and silences. But some attorneys are breaking the silence and, as a result, are opening doors for you. Resources and guidance are available. The Illinois Lawyers' Assistance Program (LAP) is here to support you every step of the way throughout your career. As attorneys, we must hold ourselves accountable for how our mental health affects daily decisions, feelings, and thoughts. Mental-health conditions are as real as any other physical ailment and can be difficult, persistent, and life-threatening. They can be masked by fear or denial.

Throwing out the script

Working toward supportive, destigmatized dialogue begins with honestly sharing how you feel when you're not at your best. First, like any trial prep, know your audience and prepare yourself. Then, consider using these suggestions. You may end up emboldening others to throw out the script:

Emotional energy. For people you don't know well: "My emotional energy is depleted. Could we talk about this tomorrow?"

Straight talk. For days when you're feeling confident and you'd like to share your story: "I have challenges with mental wellness. Sometimes it feels like [insert impact]. Today I'm feeling [good/well-aligned] ... Here's how I manage my symptoms ..."

Level up. For someone who may not accept or understand what mental wellness is: "I have a condition called [anxiety], do you know

anyone with [anxiety]? Here's how I stay on my game and manage it”

When proceeding with caution

Sometimes, you will need to protect yourself. For example, you may have a coworker or boss you do not feel comfortable communicating openly with. Where to go from here:

Identifying this situation is the first step. Pinpoint the reason why you do not feel comfortable communicating openly.

Consider your audience, reframe, and strategically identify your course of action. There is no “wrong” way, but there is the best way for you. This is where you place your focus.

Align with your core values. Identify

what is in your control, where you need to stand strong, and where you can adjust.


Validate your concerns and identify your short- and long-term goals. List steps you can take toward maintaining a healthy legal practice in the short and long term and go, go, go!

Your solutions may not be immediately realized. But if you stick to these steps, you are heading toward championing a mentally stable career and thriving as an attorney.

For those who consider people who struggle with mental health as weak-willed, consider Love's words: “Recognizing and communicating this anxiety is the best thing that ever happened to me. Bringing a spotlight to my real day-to-day

helps me to manage my symptoms and makes me feel good to know I am empowering others to break the chains of stigma.”

The legal community needs more of us to speak up and be the difference. It starts with meeting the glaring eye that is the public stigma blocking our paths to wellness.

Are you ready to discuss, understand, communicate, and explore your mental state and its impact on your legal practice? Start with LAP. We hold weekly group meetings where you can share your story, receive individual counseling, and take advantage of many other resources that are available 24/7. Give us a call at 312-726-6607 or email gethelp@illinoislap.org. 

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