

# Systemic Wellness vs. The Status Quo

By Shelley Sandoval

The status quo is often a pleasant, familiar place. However, the status quo can be based on the presumption that the way the world operates should stay the same. Currently, legal culture does not emphasize the balance of work with one's health and wellness. This phenomenon persists despite a rising demand for and focus on wellness in the legal profession over the past 40 years. The continuation of the status quo despite the rising emphasis on wellness raises the question: will we bravely lead and advocate for systemic changes to bring the profession towards a healthier and more productive future?

The Lawyer's Assistance Program (LAP) is in its 41st year of service to Illinois attorneys. Its mission is to provide assistance with substance abuse, addiction, and mental health problems. Over the past few years, over 50% of LAP's clients are attorneys under 40 years old. This figure consistently increases year-over-year. Why now are client demographics and needs shifting so rapidly?

The short answer is that it's the wellness factor. Because of it, more attorneys are seeking jobs that prioritize their health and wellness. It is unfortunately true that firms that do prioritize the balance of work with health and wellness are a rarity. And for this reason, all Illinois attorneys in pursuit of wellness are our heroes at LAP.

Among young attorneys in LAP's growing client base, the most common complaints within law firm life identified are: (1) unsupportive and overly aggressive partners; (2) lack of real mentorship to close the "knowledge gap" with which newly minted attorneys often struggle; and (3) the omnipresent "billable hours" requirement. Because we are inextricably connected to each other, systemic issues can become a nexus of epic solutions or a deluge of collective problems that remain unaddressed. Below are some ways young



attorneys can advocate for systemic wellness solutions:

- Request increased access to resources and services for Illinois attorneys. Young attorneys are expected to work hard. By making resources and services that aid their work available and easy to navigate, young attorneys will be able to increase their productivity while maintaining overall wellness.
- Ask your firm to address wellness-related issues and tragedies. Proactive internal communications are important. They provide the launching point for discussions that can generate clarity or address confusion when dealing with tough topics such as substance abuse, addiction, mental health, and suicide. News of tragedies among our colleagues run rampant, while resources and internal crisis communication are often nonexistent.
- Educate and empower your attorneys early. Intellectually vibrant and passionate young attorneys in today's environment naturally need guidance to develop

into mature, well-rounded professionals. Young attorneys look for wellness indicators during their firm placement searching, yet in their first years of service to a firm they often have little to no influence to take advantage of or advocate for wellness guidance and offerings. Giving young attorneys the opportunity to influence and inspire the wellness initiatives within their firms will spark change for the future.

- Identify a wellness integration leader within the firm. A wellness integration leader is someone who balances the firm's business plan with its wellness initiatives. This person will be responsible for frequently reviewing and reporting on the firm's business and wellness progress. It is important that this person be transparent with the firm if the firm deviates from its business and wellness plans. Having an informed leader who can clearly identify issues within firm culture and come up with solutions to resolve those issues is the key to having a successful business

and wellness model.

- Enliven a network of key players willing to speak about wellness in everyday settings. Empower one another to identify and mediate disputes before they turn into a situation. The ability to communicate next steps is critically important so that people most likely to engage in harmful behavior are connected to appropriate resources and services.
- Improve office infrastructure. Identify communal spaces for individuals to congregate with ease. Place artwork, memorabilia, magazines, or other common cultural points of interest to foster conversation and diversity in thinking. Consider the time it takes to access nature or virtual release and reset areas. Frequent breaks enhance brain productivity and focus. If firms make it easy for attorneys to achieve maximum productivity and practice well-being, everyone benefits. Accommodate wellness needs without requiring formalities like medical records

or disability documentation. Making it known that you are seeking solutions will embolden wellness. For example, ask for a standing desk, a sun simulation lamp, or other things that might help to foster individual wellness on a daily basis.

- Invest in LAP. Real Problems. Real Help. Real Experts.™ Donations to LAP to enhance and improve work behind our mission to provide assistance with substance abuse, addiction, and mental health among attorneys, judges, and law students.

No one is perfect. We do know with 100% certainty that consistently cutting corners on what we need to be fully functioning in our lives and only working for the short term is not a sustainable way to live. Something will eventually give.

Becoming a lawyer is a lifelong career choice. How you approach your practice is also a choice. Investing in your individual wellness now means adding years to your life and decreasing misery and overall wear

and tear on your body. It also means giving yourself the gift of existing in a way that suits you in the short and long term—for yourself, for those in your personal and professional life, and for your important contributions to the legal field.

Head work is different than hard work. It is on you to manage your legal practice, career, family, friends, and everything else – LAP is here to support you in wellness, today, tomorrow and when you need us: [gethelp@illinoislap.org](mailto:gethelp@illinoislap.org), 312-726-6607, [illinoislap.org](http://illinoislap.org). ■



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## LAP RESOURCES & SERVICES

What can LAP do for you? To LAP, your well-being is paramount. LAP's clinically trained team is the only resource for Illinois attorneys that offers confidential services with immunity as protected by Illinois Supreme Court Rule 1.6(d). Head to our website, [illinoislap.org](http://illinoislap.org), or call us at 312-726-6607 for a complete and individualized understanding of what LAP can do for you. In the meantime, check out these LAP expert clinical resources on the website:

- Expert Mental Health and Substance Use Assessments
- Referrals to Specialized Treatment Individual Consultations
- Ongoing Support Groups for Men, Women, Law Students
- Interventions
- Wellbeing Techniques
- CLEs streaming 24/7
- Live Presentations available for your office or organization
- Clinical publications on topics affecting our legal community

**Follow LAP on social media!** Daily content features tips, tricks, things to read/watch/engage with. Laugh, cry, comment, be with us and be reminded of our community and the resources that are YOUR LAP.

## Young Lawyers Section Annual Meeting – Cheers to 50 Years!

The Young Lawyers Section will host its annual meeting on June 2 at 5 p.m. to celebrate the Section's accomplishments during the 2020-21 bar year under the leadership of Chair Jeffrey Moskowitz and will introduce 2021-22 YLS Chair Tracy Brammeier. Members are invited to join the YLS Officers as we congratulate the Section's awardees, present our annual Liberty Bell Award to a non-lawyer and toast to the next 50 years of the YLS. Check [www.chicagobar.org](http://www.chicagobar.org) for details on how to join the event.