



### Welcome to the September issue of WellNEWS

A quarterly newsletter from the State Bar of Wisconsin Lawyers Assistance Program. WellNEWS is a benefit of your State Bar of Wisconsin membership.

## Lessons from the Early Years

*By Atty. Emily Stedman*

I have been anxious—a fretter—my whole life. I remember my first-grade teacher calling me out for it: “You’re going to go gray very early if you don’t stop worrying so much.” (She wasn’t wrong, but I suspect my early grays and worrying are both things I inherited from family.)

Until joining big law, I had always managed my anxiety and perfectionism pretty well. It was something I learned to cope with. My time management skills, hyper organization, and self-imposed breaks from people (introversion) helped me cope with and hide my fears, doubts, and worries. It built a sense of control (real or perceived, I’m not sure it matters).

When I joined a firm, those tactics came with me. I kept my head down at first. I did the work. I was a good junior associate. I did what was expected of me. I got promoted to mid-level associate. I stayed in line—I always said yes.

Despite all of this, my anxiety grew and grew. It became something beyond me, something I could not handle on my own. And: I believed I



was alone in this. I convinced myself I was the only one struggling, the only one doubting. This only caused my anxieties and fears to grow.

And then I started to question things. Was this system working for me? The answer was a resounding no. That is when things got hard. The time between realizing I wanted my career to be different and actually putting that into practice was lost time. It was a period filled with anxiety and doubt. My confidence decreased. I considered leaving the profession all together. I burned out.

I did not know, at first, that things could be different. Also, I was scared. Scared to be honest. Scared to be vulnerable. Scared to lose work. Scared to disappoint people. Scared to fall out of line. Being a “good” associate—a good daughter, student, friend, and wife—had gotten me so far. It had helped me survive and even get ahead. Until it didn’t.

Doing what you’re told and what you think is expected of you will help you get by, for a while. It’ll feel safe. But: it won’t create a sustainable career for you.

I’m 7.5 years into private practice now, and I’m still dealing (almost daily) with the repercussions of letting my stress and anxiety creep up and out of control—and into burn out. Hindsight is not always our friend, but in this case, there are some things I would have done differently as a new lawyer—and that I try to do now to overcome my struggles, fears, doubts, and frets:

- I would not have kept my head down so intensely that first year. Instead, I would have right away started building friendships with other lawyers (at my firm and outside of it). I would have been more open about my doubts and struggles. It is my friendships with other attorneys that help me know (now) that I’m on the right track or not, that help me know when the issue is worth pushing through or letting go of, and that help me know being an attorney is what I’m meant to be doing.
- I would have taken control of the billable hour from the start. There are tools and systems for keeping track of and managing the billable hour—things that help you be in control of it rather than it controlling you, rather than it being something you’re simply reacting to. I would have learned these techniques from the jump. This topic is a huge one. I have a system now, please reach out if you want to know more about it. I promise it is possible.
- I would have been more intentional about feedback and reviews. For example, you can email partners and senior associates a list of all the things you worked on with and for them ahead of the review cycle, reminding them of all you accomplished and nudging them to participate in your annual review process. This

helps you remember all you've done. It also helps the reviewer get past recency bias and see the bigger picture of the last year. It also gives you power in a situation that often makes associates feel powerless.

- I would have maintained my workout and tennis routine. Giving up hobbies and selfcare is a nearly sure sign of burnout or at least letting work takeover your life. It does not have to be that way. I'm still very much struggling with getting back to my workout routine. But I recently returned to tennis, something I deeply love. It has been a huge factor in improving my mental health these last two months. I regret letting it slip away during the pandemic.
- I would have questioned the presence of alcohol in the profession and in my life. I abstained from alcohol for 6.5 months in 2022 and my relationship with it is forever changed. I could have and should have done that much sooner. We have a double whammy in Wisconsin: the state's drinking culture + the profession's drinking culture. It is easy to go with the flow with drinking. I encourage you to become more aware of this and whether you drink because you want to or because everyone else is.
- I would not have said yes for the sake of saying yes. We are taught to never say no when we enter the profession. That is a dangerous habit and can snowball into overwhelm, mistakes, and burn out. I've learned the power of the, "Yes, but . . ." The "I'd love to help you with this, but here's what else I have on my plate. How would you manage this?" I've also learned to lead by example, giving associates junior to me the opportunity to say no and meaning it when I say they can say no to me.

I could probably go on and on. There are lots of reasons people burn out in this job. You do not have to be one of those people.

I aim to build a long term and sustainable career for myself. How? By implementing these tools, experimenting with new tools, and continuing trial and error until I find what fits (and adjusting every step of the way). And by being vulnerable, honest, and brave—for myself and for others.

Taking care of myself helps me be a better attorney. By finding and sticking to my why, I have found—even created—my own path. This is possible, even in a traditional (old school) profession. By being myself and bringing myself with me to everything I do in this job, I can get through the lows and enjoy the highs.

For many of us, our job is to learn, to grow, and to serve others. To build a reputation in the profession, we must spend time building credit with others. But, while I do that, there is space for me. And there is space for you—all of you and all you bring to being an attorney.

So, now: I cling to my identity and to what matters to me in everything I do. I try to let go of what I think others think of me (something I have no control over, and which ultimately is not my business). The profession needs each of us to do this, so:

I encourage you to do the same. First, think about what you would do differently in the early years of your career to build a more sustainable career. Second, start implementing those things, no matter how small (and no matter where you are in your career—it is never too late). And third: lead by example. It is not impossible to have a fulfilling and thriving law practice. If we do not make the effort in our own lives, the profession will never change. It is our responsibility to lead the way.

Born and raised outside of Atlanta, Georgia, **Emily Logan Stedman** has called Milwaukee home since June 2013. She obtained her B.A. cum laude (Spanish and History) in 2008 from Wake Forest University. Next, she taught 5th Grade in Buckeye, Arizona as a 2008 corps member with Teach for America. In 2010, she enrolled at the University of Mississippi School of Law, graduating in 2013 magna cum laude and having served as Editor-in-Chief of the Mississippi Law Journal.

From 2013-2016, Emily clerked for Judge Pamela Pepper, now Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin. In 2016, she joined Midwest Big Law as an associate at Quarles & Brady. Since November 2020, she has worked as a Senior Associate at Husch Blackwell, where she practices commercial litigation.

It was joining Big Law that brought on an increase in anxiety and low mood in Emily. After seeking out solace with colleagues, therapy, and meditation, she began talking more openly about the need for improving well-being in the law. This started with programming while president of the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Wisconsin, then as a committee chair for the Wisconsin Taskforce on Lawyer Well-Being. Most recently, she has built a platform on LinkedIn where she posts regularly on the realities of being a Big Law associate and the need to destigmatize lawyer well-being.

## Want to get involved with WellNews?

If you'd like to submit an article for *WellNews* please email it to [callwislap@wisbar.org](mailto:callwislap@wisbar.org)

## Meet Helaina Metcalf: New Chair of the WisLAP State Bar Committee

Dear WisLAP Community,

It is an honor to be appointed Chair of the State Bar Committee for such an important program as WisLAP. I joined the WisLAP State Bar

Committee in 2021 as a young attorney with a desire to make wellness and balance a priority in my practice from the outset. WisLAP is an amazing resource for attorneys of all practices, backgrounds, and career stages. In my role as Committee Chair, I look forward to helping the WisLAP team grow and develop the resources it offers to support the diverse challenges that attorneys face today. I want to encourage the Committee and each of its members to invest in WisLAP by getting involved, contributing ideas, offering encouragement, and promoting WisLAP's mission to our communities.



In my day-to-day practice, I am an Estate Planning Attorney at Godfrey & Kahn, S.C. in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In my free time, I enjoy relaxing with my husband and two children, reading, running, and cooking.

Thank you for all you do for WisLAP. I look forward to working together!

*Helaina Metcalf*

## Interested in becoming a Peer Support Volunteer?

WisLAP is recruiting Peer Support Volunteers, please call Amber Gilles, WisLAP Member Coordinator, at (608) 250-6151 or (800) 444-9404, ext. 6151, or by email to [agilles@wisbar.org](mailto:agilles@wisbar.org) for more information.

## Breaking the Stigma: Addressing Mental Health in the Legal Profession

*By Kaitlin Clancy*

In the demanding world of law, where intellect and dedication are prized, an often overlooked battle rages silently beneath the surface: mental health maintenance. The stigma surrounding mental health issues within the legal profession has discouraged open conversations about well-being



and caused many to suffer in silence. It's time to recognize that seeking help signifies strength, not weakness. When we address the intricacies of this issue, we uncover the power of awareness in dismantling the barriers that perpetuate the mental health epidemic, and we champion the importance of compassion, empathy, and meaningful dialogue in fostering a healthier, more resilient legal landscape.

### **The Stresses of Legal Practice:**

While I am only a 3L, I already know I need to mentally prepare to be a full-fledged lawyer in such a demanding, fast-paced environment. Attorneys carry the weight of their profession on their shoulders. From long hours to heavy caseloads to high-pressure situations, attorneys have their work cut out for them. These responsibilities and scenarios coupled with the inherent need to remain meticulous in their work product weigh heavily on their well-being. Attorneys find themselves constantly juggling overwhelming commitments. Not to mention, clients place a lot of pressure on attorneys to get the job done right and on the first attempt. The compounding pressures of being an attorney can be debilitating in terms of self-maintenance.

### **Recognizing Mental Health Issues:**

When attorneys and support staff can identify the signs, both in themselves and in colleagues they can intervene early and effectively. Symptoms of burnout, manifesting as emotional exhaustion, detachment, and reduced performance, serve as an alarming indicator of excessive stress. Anxiety and depression, often exacerbated by the high-pressure nature of legal work, can manifest in changes in behavior, mood, and productivity. Perhaps most concerning, vigilance against substance abuse is essential, as it can emerge as a coping mechanism in response to the demanding professional landscape. By acknowledging these common indicators, legal practitioners can pave the way for open discussions and proactive measures, ensuring a healthier and more supportive legal community.

### **Seeking Professional Help:**

Embracing therapy and counseling as valid tools for managing stress and mental health challenges is the first step to improvement. Legal professionals can benefit from specialized resources tailored to their unique needs, such as therapy programs geared toward addressing the complexity of the legal world. These resources not only offer a safe space to explore their emotions and concerns but also provide coping strategies and practical guidance to navigate the demands of the legal arena. By normalizing the act of seeking help, legal practitioners can cultivate a culture that prioritizes mental health and empowers individuals to thrive both personally and professionally. At the very least,

don't knock it until you've tried it. If you still don't like it, that's your prerogative.

### **Supportive Work Environments:**

Firms can actively contribute to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Forward-thinking firms are recognizing the vitality of supporting their employees beyond their professional responsibilities. Initiatives such as employee assistance programs provide a confidential platform for legal professionals to seek guidance, counseling, and resources tailored to their mental health needs. Embracing flexible work arrangements acknowledges the diverse challenges attorneys face and allows them to balance their personal and professional lives more effectively. For example, since the Covid-19 pandemic, encountering a hybrid schedule has become more common in giving attorneys the capacity to maintain their schedules based on their wellness needs and responsibilities to clients. Firms have the power to improve attorney satisfaction and retention by creating spaces where legal professionals can thrive both inside and outside the courtroom.

### **Work-Life Balance:**

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for sustaining long-term success in the legal field. Effective time management is necessary for legal professionals to allocate dedicated periods for work and personal pursuits. For example, boundaries establishing specific cutoff times for work-related tasks help prevent the intrusion of professional obligations into personal time. Keeping work and life separate can prove to be beneficial in supporting mental health maintenance.

### **Coping Strategies:**

Cultivating effective coping strategies can help mitigate stress and avoid burnout. For example, hobbies outside of work can help legal professionals recharge and refocus their energies. Practicing relaxation techniques like muscle relaxation or mindfulness meditation can provide a temporary break from the pressures of the profession, promoting mental clarity and emotional balance to continue with the day. As previously mentioned, seeking therapy or counseling, whether individually or through group sessions, offers a dedicated space to process emotions and develop healthy coping mechanisms specific to the stressors attorneys face. There is no limit to what a healthy coping mechanism can be – from artistic expression to outdoor activities. I kickbox to blow off steam and leave the gym feeling refreshed and ready to take on the rest of my day.

### **Self-Care Practices:**

Three things are fundamental to self-care: (1) getting enough sleep, (2) eating sufficiently, and (3) exercising. Adequate sleep directly impacts mental sharpness, emotional resilience, and overall health. Proper nutrition further contributes to sustained energy levels and cognitive function, supporting their ability to tackle complex legal challenges. Further, by prioritizing regular exercise, attorneys can harness the physical and mental benefits of movement, which include reduced stress, increased focus, and improved mood. Apart from the big three, engaging in activities that promote mental relaxation, such as reading, mindfulness practices, or spending quality time with loved ones, rounds out a comprehensive self-care routine. Find what makes sense for you.

### **Legal Education on Mental Health:**

The integration of mental health awareness and coping mechanisms into the law school curriculum may be a pivotal step toward equipping future attorneys for the multifaceted challenges of their profession. By introducing discussions on mental health, stress management, and coping strategies early on, law schools can foster a culture that acknowledges the importance of well-being alongside legal proficiency. Moreover, incorporating principles of trauma-informed care can sensitively prepare aspiring lawyers to interact with clients who may have experienced trauma. Equipping students with a toolbox of self-care techniques, such as awareness, mindfulness, and effective stress management, ensures they graduate not only with the legal acumen to succeed but also with the emotional resilience to navigate the demanding nature of legal practice while safeguarding their mental health.

**Kaitlin Clancy** serves as the co-president of the Organization for Student Well-Being at Marquette University Law School. With a dedicated focus on promoting mental health and trauma-informed care, she has also been an advocate for survivors of sexual violence on campus. Kaitlin is on track to earn her JD/MBA, with an expected graduation date in May 2024.

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## **Italian Meatballs Recipe**

**Prep time:** 20 minutes

**Cook time:** 20 minutes

**Servings:** 8-10

### **Ingredients**

Cost per serving \$1.53 - [view details](#)

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1 pound pork sausage (I prefer reduced-fat)
- 2/3 cup prepared Italian style bread crumbs
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese (I used Grana Padano)
- 2 eggs
- 1/3 cup finely minced onion
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/3 cup minced fresh parsley
- 1 teaspoon dry Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon Kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- Small amount cooking oil



### Directions

1. In large mixing bowl, measure the meats, bread crumbs, cheese, eggs, onion, garlic, parsley, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper.
2. Mix thoroughly until well combined. Form into 2-inch size balls.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a non-stick large skillet over medium heat (I use 2 separate skillets to get meatballs done at same time.)
4. Cook meatballs until well browned, turning occasionally (approximately 15-20 minutes; I add a lid toward the end to steam through to centers.)
5. Serve with spaghetti sauce or alfredo sauce.

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