

# WELLNESS: JUST KEEPING GOING

by Jessica Daley Marra

## Returning to Work and Mental Health; Just Keep Going

Winston Churchill once said “[i]f you are going through hell, keep going.” This year is one history will remember. COVID 19 has rocked our world and flipped us all upside down. The pandemic has affected our physical health, businesses, financial stability, employment, and family relationships. Even those fortunate enough to stay healthy have worried about keeping themselves and their families healthy, keeping their businesses afloat, keeping their jobs, and paying their bills. On top of this, we have missed our families and social gatherings.

Parents have worried about being “good” moms and dads, their children’s education, learning to Zoom, making sure assignments are done and actually submitted, ensuring their children don’t feel isolated... all while working... from home, so that they can... keep their businesses afloat, keep their jobs, and pay their bills. Wow.

On top of that, many of us in the legal profession have Zoom networking events, mentorship responsibilities, meetings, phone calls; all while trying to make the “new normal” more tolerable. And let us not forget our law school graduates, whose stress has been compounded during the most stressful period of their life because of this pandemic.

None of this even takes into account anyone that is caring for someone that is ill or someone that is ill themselves, and the immense stress that exists just trying to keep yourself and those whom you love healthy in this uncertain time. Nor does it take into account those who have lost someone, due to COVID or otherwise, and having to deal with such an immense loss without the usual family support, plus all of the other life stressors. *See above.*

To say this is a lot is an understatement. The pandemic has taken its toll on all of us in some respect, especially our mental health. Lawyers were already 3.6 times more likely than other professions to battle depression, and per the CDC, our profession ranked fourth in suicide rates before the pandemic ever began.

So how do we “keep going”? The answer may be this simple; we do not need to do it alone. Florida Supreme Court Justice Alan Lawson will discuss this during his Wellness Webinar on October 22, His topic will be “Self-evident? The Surprisingly Deep Connection Between Personal Well-Being and Everything Else

(Ethical Behavior, Professional Performance, Personal Relationships, Health, Longevity and More)”. We are all, truly, in this together. Look to your left and look to your right, wherever you are standing... the person beside you is tired, stressed, overwhelmed, and worried about something. In this COVID era, it is too hard not to be. So, first, perhaps give yourself and your neighbor (or even your adversary) a little bit of grace, a little kindness, and certainly an extra dose of professionalism. We all need each other right now and the smallest act of kindness or professional courtesy from you can shape not only that person’s day but your own, in a very positive way.

While our profession has historically stigmatized mental health, under the leadership of our Florida Bar this issue in our profession is now, appropriately, of chief concern and openly discussed. Whether talking to a friend, or speaking with a professional, talking helps. The Florida Bar’s Mental Health and Wellness Committee has taken wonderful steps in creating the Florida Lawyers Helpline, providing a free (completely confidential) resource for us all. Florida Bar President Dori Foster Morales recently and aptly stated, “*If we solve our own problems, we’re going to be better at solving the world’s problems.*”

Lastly, we must all learn (myself included) to allow ourselves to be imperfect and prioritize to save our sanity. Author Nora Roberts perhaps said it best, that “[t]he key to juggling is to know that some of the balls you have in the air are made of plastic and some are made of glass.” By prioritizing our responsibilities, and focusing on the glass balls, we can take a deep breath and get through the day. What was plastic today may be glass tomorrow. But for today, it is OK if the plastic balls hit the ground.

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