

Taking a Healthy Risk: The Lawyers Group

By Tim Batdorf

If you read the Practicing Wellness column in the July 2009 issue of the Michigan Bar Journal, you have already “met” my esteemed colleague, Tim Batdorf. Tim is an avid supporter of attorney wellness who also gives of his time as a Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program (LJAP) volunteer. I appreciate the integrity that Tim demonstrates with regard to his own quest for quality of life.

Tim’s latest endeavor is a leadership/wellness group for lawyers called, appropriately, “The Lawyers Group.” Because of Tim’s focus on strength-based transformation and general wellness within the context of his group, LJAP has started referring select program participants to him as part of their monitoring requirement for the State Bar and will use him as a resource for other attorneys interested in personal growth. Following are brief comments from Tim about The Lawyers Group and an anonymous testimonial from a participant in Tim’s pilot group.

—Martha D. Burkett,
Program Administrator, LJAP

Several years ago, I read about a Seattle attorney who started a lawyers’ group, which entailed lawyers meeting periodically to discuss their careers and lives. The concept of a lawyers’ group fascinated me.

On a personal level, over the past 10 years I have been involved in all sorts of groups and have had the privilege of facilitating many of them. The thought occurred to me that I could combine something I love personally (facilitating groups) with lawyers, so I started asking lawyers if they would be interested in forming a lawyers’ group. Every lawyer I talked to expressed interest in the group, although a few could not participate because of time constraints. Even more surprisingly, lawyers whom I did not know be-

gan contacting me because they wanted to participate in the group.

What I initially thought would be three or four lawyers grew to nine. The group has lawyers from all walks of life: men and women, solo practitioners, big-firm lawyers, lawyers in transition, and in-house counsel. The common bond is the practice of law. It has been truly amazing watching these relative strangers who share nothing but the bond of their profession become friends and allies. We agreed to meet weekly for seven weeks and see what happened. On

the seventh week, the group wanted to continue meeting monthly. From my perspective and on the basis of feedback I’ve received, creating a lawyers’ group has been extremely worthwhile. See the sidebar below for a testimonial from one of the group’s participants. ■

Tim Batdorf is a lawyer, career coach, and the founder of Lawyer & Self™, which produces The Lawyer’s Career Kit™—a self-coaching program for lawyers. For more information, visit www.lawyerandself.com.

Testimonial: The Lawyers Group

I was recently asked by a colleague to participate in a “lawyers’ group” that would meet for weekly two-hour sessions for seven weeks. “Hmmm...lawyer group therapy?” I pondered. No, I was told, this would be a workshop for self-improvement with a group of lawyers. I thought about it for a few days. My life was going well. I am a happy person with a good job and life. But I *had* experienced a lot of tragedy in the prior recent years, including a bad divorce. I was also feeling the incredible pressures of the sinking economy and pressures at my firm to get clients, and concluded that this sort of group could not hurt me and would probably help me better navigate the challenges of life and this profession.

At the first meeting, a diverse group of lawyers sat in a circle—all of us a little unsure of what we would be doing since this was the first such group that the facilitator, Tim Batdorf, put together. For the most part, this group of lawyers did not know each other and worked in a variety of specialties and a range of practice settings.

Each week we did exercises to help us explore our own strengths and weaknesses and learn about how others perceived us. We took advantage of the benefit of each other—all attorneys and counselors able to offer advice and suggestions. We were able to do this because of the strong premise of trust and confidentiality established in the group.

I would never have expected that in seven weeks we would be sharing and exposing our fears and thoughts with each other as though we were lifelong friends. Our group connected and decided to continue our sessions monthly for an unspecified time. I would recommend this type of group to any lawyer. For the short investment of time, the returns are priceless. In addition to making new friends, I feel as though I emerged a better person, having learned a lot about myself and the others.

—Anonymous