

Two Absolutes

By Tish Vincent

Some days at the office are quiet. A few tasks may need attention, but there are no pressing deadlines and no scheduled meetings.

On one such day, a family member called with concerns about the health of an attorney with whom they lived. The caller's responses to careful questioning revealed worrisome behavior. This attorney could not seem to stay awake for any significant period. Throughout the day, the person would fall asleep while engaged in a project or in the middle of a conversation. Coworkers were concerned about similar patterns at the office; the attorney would get to work, turn on the computer, start organizing the day, and fall asleep. This behavior repeated throughout the day.

The family member was advised to approach the attorney about these episodes in a specific manner. The effort was successful, and the attorney came to our office for an assessment. None of the probable causes—substance-use disorder, depression, severe stress—were triggering this behavior.

The case management plan involved a thorough medical examination. Because of a busy work schedule, the attorney hadn't visited a doctor in years. An appointment was made with a primary care physician. The diagnosis? Sleep apnea. The attorney's oxygen levels were low, and a sleep study revealed that the individual stopped breathing numerous times throughout the night. Because of low energy, this person would look to food for a boost; the onset of apnea led to a 100-pound weight gain. The weight gain made the sleep apnea worse, creating a vicious cycle.

This story has a happy ending. The attorney followed the doctor's recommendations

and got a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) device to help with breathing during sleep. The increase in energy led to a renewed exercise regimen, and more exercise led to better eating habits.

The call from a concerned family member ultimately resulted in vast improvements to this attorney's health and well-being. The attorney responded to the concern by seeking help, which can be difficult for attorneys to do.

What are the two absolutes referred to in the title? Regular medical care and exercise.

Medical care

Our culture in general, and the legal culture specifically, puts pressure on us to "have it together"; admitting we don't can be frightening.

Physicians are trained to support patients in tending to their well-being and have intimate knowledge of the challenges and stresses in their patients' lives. Choosing a personal physician, getting to know and trust him or her, and scheduling annual visits are a fundamental part of maintaining one's well-being.

Routine medical care is important for everyone. Consider how parents of young children schedule regular appointments for their little ones with a pediatrician or family practitioner. The children have annual well-child examinations and are evaluated for school and sports. Schools require updated physicals each fall. Adults need a similar commitment to their own health.

Exercise

"Physical activity, movement, and play are essential to our physical, social, emo-

tional, and cognitive well-being and for our development at every age."¹ The *Well-Being Toolkit for Lawyers and Legal Employers* contains helpful worksheets that encourage healthy lifestyle choices; worksheet 16 on pages 88–91 is a road map for getting involved in regular exercise and the benefits it produces.

Exercise has many psychological as well as physical benefits. It acts as a natural antidepressant and helps create a sense of independence. Regular exercisers experience joy, mastery, and fulfillment. Confidence and kinesthetic awareness increase, as do positive feelings about one's body.² Aerobic exercise provides health benefits as well. It boosts energy, strengthens your heart, increases brain power, and improves executive functions.³

The two absolutes of regular medical care and a commitment to exercise transformed one attorney's life.

Download the *Well-Being Toolkit* and read through it. Jump to the worksheets and pick one that speaks to you. Let this be the year your personal well-being becomes part of your daily to-do list. ■

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ENDNOTES

1. Brafford, *Well-Being Toolkit for Lawyers and Legal Employers*, ABA (2018), pp 88–94 <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer_assistance/lc_colap_well-being_toolkit_for_lawyers_legal_employers.authcheckdam.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/UK3ZJTX2>] [website accessed December 5, 2019].
2. *Id.* at 91.
3. *Id.*