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#STIGMAFREE TENNESSEE ALONG THE ROAD BEST TRAVELED

Along the way this year, we have talked about removing the stigma of addiction as a first step in traveling the road to resolution. Shelley Moore-White, Director of Critical Care Services at East Tennessee Children's Hospital, reminds us of this truth in this month's column as she writes about the most vulnerable and innocent victims of the opioid crisis. In researching more about the issue, I came across New York attorney Lisa Smith's powerful memoir, *Girl Walks Out of a Bar*, sharing her personal journey of recovery from drugs and alcohol. In my subsequent email exchanges with her, she shared that she and her husband are moving to California, where she will no longer practice law. Instead, she will devote herself fulltime to helping others, and in particular attorneys, with their well-being.

The Bar to which we are admitted to practice sets a very high bar governing every aspect of our professional lives, and in many ways, our personal lives as well. And rightly so. But with that looms the inevitable specter of high stress. Succumbing to that stress carries its own stigma.

To my mind, servant leaders lead best by being real, open, and willing to talk about hard issues that can tear away at a person's ability to be their best and strongest selves. To equip themselves to help others, they need to also help themselves. Consider my dear friend. Several years ago, she was at a point in her life that should have been her happiest. The practice was exploding, she was newly married, she had a beautiful new home, and her loved ones were happy and healthy. To the outside observer, she appeared strong and competent as she maintained her professional demands. Client interests were protected and served well. Inside was another matter, and that only caused a spiraling of the stress inherent to the huge demands of being an attorney. It did not help that one client was particularly self-destructive and the attorney felt helpless to prevent the impending sabotage to her client's case. Maybe attorneys should not internalize their client's problems, but if we are at all compassionate, that is just part and parcel to being admitted to the Bar.

To avoid dealing with the internal issues, my friend threw herself further into work. Like Hansel and Gretel's path, it was not a good one to traverse. The first casualty was sleep. All is well that ends well. In a few weeks, she acknowledged something had to change and this would require putting aside any perceived stigma about embracing help. You already know my friend's name is Wynne.

When I bounced the idea for this message off several colleagues, I was met with nothing but enthusiasm and a number of similar personal stories that include how the stigma of being vulnerable at times interfered with their well-being or asking for help. Every one of them expressed this message was timely and hoped I would write it.

Apparently, the Florida Young Lawyers Division has just launched its #stigmafreeyld campaign with the message that it is both okay and healthy to seek help for stress or mental health issues. You might check out the website where Bar members share their experiences

in videos at flayld.org/stigmafreeyld-campaign. I am so enamored with their commitment that I borrowed from their tag line. And I would be remiss if I did not mention the equal dedication of the KBA Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers Committee with help only a phone call away to Jim Cornelius at 292-2515 or John Butler at 244-3925.

In September, your Knoxville Bar Association is holding a day-long Balancing the Scales of Work and Wellness Expo. There will be programming on how a lawyer's deskbound schedule impacts physical and mental health, detecting signs of toxic stress and strategies for addressing it, self-care strategies for mental health issues, and prioritizing healthy life-style choices. Covenant Health will be on site providing free health screenings. Executive Director Marsha Watson asked me to serve as a guinea pig for the confidential online health survey members can take to prepare for those screenings. My results were interesting. I have some work to do, but I am also in a really great place. The Expo is designed to promote our physical and mental well-being with increased productivity.

I hope you will also join us at the Supreme Court Dinner to hear Vicki Clark explain her life of servant leadership. We are also hosting the Minority Law Student Reception and Diversity Program with speaker Janice Brown, who thrives to help attorneys transform their practice while living authentic lives. September is going to be a great month for our Bar association.

I end with this: if you need help, call a colleague. Call me. If a colleague reaches out for help, answer the call and step up immediately to be supportive. We all know how to keep confidences and we will do so, but also know that there is no shame in needing or asking for help at times. Better health and supporting one another are first steps along the road best traveled.

