

YOUNG LAWYERS

Linnsey Amores, Esq.

Former Chairperson
Young Lawyers Section
The West Virginia State Bar



FINDING YOUR BALANCE

With the acceptance of a new position with The Hartford Insurance Company in the Arizona Staff Legal Office, I recently resigned from my role as Chairperson of the Young Lawyer Section. However, I agreed to write one last column for *The West Virginia Lawyer*. I chose my topics a year ago without any idea what 2018 would hold for me and my family. Oddly enough, each of the topics I chose to write about — educate, lead, serve, and balance — led me to where I am now.

In my endeavor to grow as a leader, I do a lot of reading. I recently finished *Daring to Lead* by Brené Brown. She spends a great deal of time discussing values in her book, specifically how one's values shape how we lead, make decisions, and live our lives. She asks the reader to select two values from a list of about 122 options. These options are all values we

likely aspire to hold, so choosing just two from a list that included community, cooperation, honesty, perseverance, and diversity was difficult. I limited mine down to a top five, and after careful consideration, I decided the word “balance” deserved to be near the top on my list.

Balance means different things for different people, but to me it means making the time to do the things I have to do and want to do. More specifically, balance is working efficiently and accurately so I have time to spend with my family and friends, time to travel and do self-care, and balancing the commitments of being in a marriage and raising two children while working full time. I've often heard that it's unrealistic to try to live a balanced life, especially while practicing law. I disagree. It can be done — with planning, the right support system, and knowing what

works to relax and re-energize yourself. More importantly, it **must** be done to sustain your law practice throughout the decades.

In my West Virginia litigation practice, I traveled, on average, about two or three days a week across the state, often having to stay overnight for early morning hearings. I also joyfully used every vacation day I had available for the last eight years, and I'm proud of that. I acted on the solid advice I received from Victor Flanagan, Esq. when I started practicing: 1) When you litigate, you can control your own schedule, so make it work for you; and 2) Traveling away from home as a parent, makes you a better parent when you return. This advice, combined with a legal assistant who takes care not to over-schedule you and a supportive spouse who can balance out the home workload, makes living a balanced life as a

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litigator completely possible. Most of the time, I feel I have found my balance. I recognize not everyone in this profession is so lucky, and most of my friends, colleagues and classmates have, at one time or another, suffered from burnout, stress, anxiety, depression or substance abuse due to the pressure of being a lawyer.

I share my personal viewpoint of balance for one important reason. Our profession suffers burnout, mental health issues, addiction and stress-related physical ailments at an alarming rate. The American Bar Association created a task force to develop a path to well being for attorneys, and published the results in 2017.¹ The ABA found that approximately a quarter of lawyers suffered from alcohol addiction, depression, anxiety and/or stress. *Id.* Notably, young lawyers experienced the highest rates of problem drinking and depression. *Id.* Oftentimes, we are able to regain our focus, enthusiasm for our careers, and sense of appreciation for our families after disconnecting from the office and using our vacation days. Other times, lawyers need something more to remedy the mental illness, stress, and addiction related to trying to maintain a law practice. In that instance, lawyers need information, resources, and support to establish the well being necessary to overcome their hurdles and thrive in their practice. Fortunately for West Virginia

lawyers, help is available to get practitioners back to their balance.

The West Virginia State Bar and the West Virginia Supreme Court established the Judicial & Lawyer Assistance Program (JLAP) in 2013 to support lawyers, judges, and law students “who are struggling with retirement, stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, or other mental/physical/emotional health issues” that affect their practice. JLAP offers free, confidential support and resources to any lawyer, judge, or law student who needs it. JLAP can be contacted easily at www.wvjlap.org or 304-553-7232.

As I conclude my last column, I encourage my fellow West Virginia lawyers to take care of themselves and seek the balance that makes them the happiest in their careers and personal lives; show kindness and compassion to one another; and support fellow practitioners in West Virginia, as I was supported in my time there. **WVL**

Endnote

1. American Bar Association, National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, Aug. 14, 2017, <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/ThePathToLawyerWellBeingReportRevFINAL.pdf>.