

YOUNG LAWYERS

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MAKING A DAILY PRIORITY OF PRESERVING YOUR INNER SPARKLE

Steve Jobs said he looked in the mirror every morning and asked himself the following question, “[i]f today were the last day of your life, would you want to do what you are about to do today?” Asking ourselves these types of questions helps us to prioritize our lives and seek what truly makes us sparkle inside. As law students, we are taught the mysteries of the law under a fair amount of stress and pressure. There were days when it seemed insurmountable and other days when you saw the light at the end of the tunnel. In my experience, there were two things that were not really discussed outside of orientation day — the practice of law looks different than the study of law, and the practice of law, taken in concert with living life, can be very stressful. As newly practicing attorneys, we are more likely aware of the former, but the latter is an issue seldom discussed which

requires daily attention and action. When we are young, we worry about tomorrow as if it is promised. As we grow and mature, it becomes clear that life is short, and, in the words of Kanye West, “nothing in life is promised, except death.” Morbid as that statement may seem, it is true. It is for that very reason that we must be sure to take care and charge of ourselves daily, and make ourselves and our well-being a priority.

According to a 2015 article on MentalHealthDaily.com, it was reported that “[w]orking lawyers are thought to have higher rates of depression than the average U.S. citizen — some research indicates their rates are approximately 3.6 times that of average occupations.”¹ This, in addition to other studies, gives rise to our profession being among the top 11 professions by suicide rate. While not all lawyers suffer from depression and suicidal ideations, the

“statistics indicated that lawyers are 1.33 times more likely to [commit suicide] than an average citizen.”² We need to ask ourselves why this is so, and when we do, we find we do not need to look far to find the answer. The same article lays out a compelling, albeit not totally complete, argument, which is a great starting point. “Becoming a lawyer requires significant education and educational expenses. Additionally, once an individual completes the necessary education to become a lawyer, they often have accumulated debt from student loans.”³ Most of us can relate with that struggle and, even those of us who cannot, can understand it.

The article continues “[s]imultaneously, [lawyers] often have difficulties finding a good job that meets their expected income level.”⁴ News flash: most of us do not leave law school and walk directly into

a financial windfall. The average citizen believes that lawyers and doctors are rolling in money, and it would make sense that we would be as we have expended a lot of time and energy on a professional education, not to mention that is how these professions are depicted on television; however, “Big Firm” jobs are limited, and, quite frankly, are not for everyone. Regardless of whether your walk was to a big firm, a small firm, hanging your own shingle, working for a nonprofit or becoming a government lawyer — many of us have a little sticker shock and possibly some buyer’s remorse when we start our first legal gig. As we move forward in our careers, we may buy a house and a new car, marry our partners and maybe have children. For many of us responsibilities continue to expand regardless of any changes at our employment and income. How are we responding when life — work and personal — become more complicated? Are we taking steps to protect our well-being and the well-being of the people we love?

Steve Jobs left our society with many fancy toys and fascinating technology. However, in my opinion, some of the most priceless gems he left us with were his words of wisdom throughout, and at the end of, his life. He stated, “[m]y favorite things in life don’t cost any money. It’s really clear that the most precious resource we all have is time.” There are but 24 hours in a day, and endless responsibilities. Be sure to take the time to take care of yourself so as not to lose your inner sparkle. Take time to be present with and love your families and friends. Jobs also advised to “[t]reat yourself well and cherish others. As we get older, we are smarter, and we slowly realize that the whether the watch is worth \$30 or \$300 — both show the same time. Whether we carry a purse worth \$30 or \$300 — the amount of money in the wallets are the same. Whether we drive a car worth \$150,000 or a car worth \$30,000 — the road and distance are the same and we reach the same destination. If the house we live in is 300 square feet or 3,000 square meters — the

loneliness is the same.” And if you find yourself in a place where you are left with loneliness and despair, do not try to traverse it alone or self-medicate. Reach out for help before the last flicker of your sparkle is doused by the overwhelming stressors in life.

There are resources available for you to work through these feelings including the West Virginia Judicial & Lawyer Assistance Program (304-553-7232), the Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) and many others. Reach out for help before the situation becomes completely all consuming. We think nothing of seeing a doctor for physical ailments. We should have the same confidence in seeking assistance for emotional, mental and substance abuse issues. Always know that YOU are important, what you are feeling is real and there is no shame in seeking out help before an action that cannot be reversed takes place.

Finally, Jobs shared that “your true inner happiness does not come from the material things of this world. Whether you’re flying first class or economy class — if the plane crashes, you crash with it.” Take the time and the steps to protect your well-being and live a life that protects and nurtures your inner sparkle. Things come and things go, our goal is to find a place in this life where we have or can find joy from within, regardless of our material possessions and personal circumstances.

And in the event you find yourself in crisis, know your resources to help you through the storms that life brings. Life is too short, and time spent comes at a premium, choose yourself and your well-being as a priority every day. **WVL**

Endnotes

1. Top 11 Professions with Highest Suicide Rates. (last visited 7/15/2019) <https://mentalhealthdaily.com/2015/01/06/top-11-professions-with-highest-suicide-rates/>
2. *Id.*
3. *Id.*
4. *Id.*