

# General Practice, Solo & Small Firm

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's General Practice, Solo & Small Firm Section

## When the Caregiver Needs Care

BY SONIA D. COLEMAN

The Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct state that it is the lawyer's responsibility to zealously represent his/her client.

Rule 1.3 provides in pertinent part:

[1] A lawyer should pursue a matter on behalf of a client despite opposition, obstruction or personal inconvenience to the lawyer, and take whatever lawful and ethical measures are required to vindicate a client's cause or endeavor. A lawyer

must also act with commitment and dedication to the interests of the client and with zeal in advocacy upon the client's behalf.

As attorneys the services we provide and how we perform them are held to a high standard. At times, we are charged with advocating for our clients who have experienced or are still experiencing trauma. "Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster."<sup>1</sup> Many times, people

*Continued on next page*

When the Caregiver Needs Care  
1

ISBA Awards  
1

## ISBA Awards

Get recognized or recognize someone you know for an ISBA award. Know a great young lawyer or law school student? Know someone who provides countless hours of pro bono service or is a long-time practicing government attorney? Nominate them today!

Note that all nominations must be received by March 5 to be considered for each award.

### ISBA Awards

#### Austin Fleming Newsletter Editors Award

This award honors outstanding editors or past editors of ISBA newsletters. It is based on the concept of meritorious service to the Association and is not necessarily to be given every year.

#### The Carole K. Bellows Women of Influence Award

The Carole K. Bellows Women of

Influence award honors two individuals each year that raise awareness to the unmet legal needs of women, advocates for action addressing women's issues, or promotes involvement by women in the legal community at all levels.

#### Community Leadership Award

Given by the ISBA's Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), the honor recognizes individuals

*Continued on page 5*

## When the Caregiver Needs Care

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

hire psychologists to help them to deal with the psychological implications of trauma. They also retain attorneys to deal with legal implications of emotional and physical trauma.

As a general rule, most attorneys are able to handle these responsibilities after careful consideration of the facts and circumstances of the legal matter with ease. However, if we are not careful, we can find out that we are often giving from an empty cup. An “empty cup” means we have been giving to others even when it is clear that we are emotionally, mentally and physically exhausted and need to take a break. We can give ourselves permission to say “no” to projects and people when saying “yes” would not be to our benefit.<sup>2</sup>

This is true. If we fail to take care of ourselves, we will struggle to adequately care for others. We need to ensure that we develop ways to “keep our cups full,” so that we can provide optimum care to our families, our clients and our communities. We need to take the time to do the things for ourselves that can help us to be in a better position to care for others. These include annual physical and dental exams, managing stress, getting regular amounts of sleep and rest, and ensuring that we are well nourished.

Experiencing physical symptoms may be an indication of exhaustion. We decide what is important to us, and we may find that not every client and project is worthy of our time and attention. We decide what brings value to our lives and where we should invest our emotional energy, time and attention. One way to determine how to do this is to prioritize what is important by establishing boundaries and ensuring that those boundaries are protected. We must make certain that our own needs are being met before turning our attention to others, for we cannot provide the best care to our clients if we have not first provided optimum care to ourselves.

What is a caregiver? “A caregiver is generally defined as someone, typically over age 18, who provides care for another. It

may be a person who is responsible for the direct care, protection, and supervision of children in a child care home, or someone who tends to the needs of the elderly or disabled. It is generally one who gives assistance to another person who is no longer able to perform the critical tasks of personal or household care necessary for everyday survival.”<sup>3</sup> While we may not normally associate a “caregiver” with the role an attorney provides, there are many similarities to what is expected of us. For example, while we are not providing physical care to our clients, we are certainly providing care, protection and supervision to clients for their legal issues. Many times people come to us for counsel because they are no longer able to handle critical life challenges on their own.

Generally, people who are accustomed to caring for others sometimes do not take a break from caregiving until they experience what is commonly called “burnout.” Symptoms of burnout include, but are not limited to, the following: “behavioral change, chronic headaches, chronic stomach or bowel problems, complete neglect of personal needs, continuation or increase in escapist activities, desire to “drop out” of society, desire to move away from work or friends/family.” Escapist activities include diversionary activities whereby one does not face reality. Some escapist activities can include procrastination, drinking alcohol excessively, abusing drugs or other forms of recreational activity. It can also be a way to divert one’s attention from feelings of depression or anxiety.<sup>4</sup>

Have you ever felt this way? If you have, you are not alone. Recognizing these symptoms in ourselves can be the first step to being proactive in our self-care regimens. If we are experiencing these or other symptoms, then it may benefit us to engage in self-care and share our experiences with others including friends, a therapist, coach, mentor or other more experienced practitioner. It is critical to do so before symptoms worsen, so that we don’t find ourselves unable to provide for our clients

## General Practice, Solo & Small Firm

This is the newsletter of the ISBA’s General Practice, Solo & Small Firm Section. Section newsletters are free to section members and published at least four times per year. Section membership dues are \$30 per year.

To join a section, visit [www.isba.org/sections](http://www.isba.org/sections) or call 217-525-1760.

### OFFICE

ILLINOIS BAR CENTER  
424 S. SECOND STREET  
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62701  
PHONES: 217-525-1760 OR 800-252-8908  
WWW.ISBA.ORG

### EDITORS

John T. Phipps  
Hon. Edna Turkington-Viktora

### PUBLICATIONS MANAGER

Sara Anderson  
✉ [sanderson@isba.org](mailto:sanderson@isba.org)

### GENERAL PRACTICE, SOLO & SMALL FIRM SECTION COUNCIL

Carl R. Draper, Feldman, Chair  
Deidre Baumann, Vice-Chair  
Roza B. Gossage, Secretary  
Nick Dominic Kujawa, Jr., Ex-Officio  
Sonia Denae Coleman  
Ashley D. Davis  
Timothy E. Duggan  
Van-Lear P. Eckert  
Robert Don Fink  
Mary Anne Spellman Gerstner  
Kelli E. Gordon, CLE Committee Liaison  
Ebony R. Huddleston, CLE Coordinator  
Ashanti Madlock Henderson  
Joseph Thomas Morrison  
Michael Kirby Muldoon  
Siobhan C. Murray,  
David V. Najarian  
John T. Phipps, Newsletter Co-Editor  
Hon. James M. Radcliffe, III  
Frank P. Venis  
Antwan Malik Williams  
Amanda G. Highlander, Board Liaison  
Mary M. Grant, Staff Liaison  
Hon. Edna Turkington-Viktora, Associate Member/Co-Editor

DISCLAIMER: This newsletter is for subscribers’ personal use only; redistribution is prohibited. Copyright Illinois State Bar Association. Statements or expressions of opinion appearing herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Association or Editors, and likewise the publication of any advertisement is not to be construed as an endorsement of the product or service offered unless it is specifically stated in the ad that there is such approval or endorsement.

Articles are prepared as an educational service to members of ISBA. They should not be relied upon as a substitute for individual legal research.

The articles in this newsletter are not intended to be used and may not be relied on for penalty avoidance.

and the tasks at hand. Moreover, we must not neglect loved ones who may be dependent on us as well.

Why is this important? One of the most important reasons to make our healthcare a priority is due to the affects our health has on so many other areas of our lives, and when we do so, we are able to better focus on these areas. For example, if we are not feeling well physically, then we may struggle to perform our jobs. If we have physical illnesses, we may not be able to appear in court or present and defend at depositions. If we do not follow our physician's orders, then we may be unable to heal from our injuries or conquer health challenges.

So, if you are experiencing burnout or emotional exhaustion, how can you recover? Here are some suggestions that you may find helpful:

**Establish a Strong Support Network:**

The people we surround ourselves with will influence us, whether we realize it or not. The more positive these influences, the greater their contributions to a quality life. It is crucial to surround ourselves with people who offer encouragement and support, and with those who have our best interests at heart. It is equally important that these people serve as our cheerleaders, who will encourage us when we doubt ourselves and need objective advice. We cannot control our colleagues, supervisors or others within our work environment, but we can create our own strong support network. As human beings, there will be times when we will experience disappointment, defeat or less than stellar outcomes. It is during those times that we need people in our inner circle to remind us of our positive qualities and provide an honest assessment.

We are not created to be independent, but to develop interdependent mutually reciprocal relationships with people who share similar goals and values. If not, then we may either self-sabotage or simply give up. In developing a strong support network, have an open mind and seek input from people, and balance their advice and its impact. The people who surround us should help us to become better people. At best, they will encourage and support us, and we will encourage and support them as well.

**Take Vacations or Breaks:** Since the

law is a very demanding profession, it may be challenging to take long or extended breaks or vacations, especially if we are solo practitioners. This is why it is so important to have a strong support network. Having this strong support network can enable one to take breaks or vacations, if you have an attorney to help with clients in your absence, assist with cases or even appear in court on your behalf. Though it may often be impractical to take vacations lasting longer than a week, even a long extended weekend can be helpful towards relaxing and reducing stress.

**Utilize Self-Help:** There are several ways for us to encourage ourselves on a regular basis. Reading self-help books and applying their techniques has been very beneficial for me. The following books have benefited me at different stages in my life:

- *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie,
- *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* by Stephen R. Covey,
- *The Power of Intention* by Dr. Wayne Dyer,
- *Success with a Positive Mental Attitude* by Napoleon Hill, and
- *The Little Black Book of Success* by Elaine Meryl Brown, Marsha Haygood, and Rhonda Joy McLean.

Reading about the experiences of others can sometimes assist in understanding our own experiences and appreciating another person's point of view. It can also provide us with practical tips towards improving our attitudes, overcoming obstacles and succeeding in life. Reading about the experiences of others can also serve as a reminder that we are not alone in experiencing difficulties and hardships in life.

**Practice Spirituality:** We can incorporate spiritual practices, such as meditation or yoga into our routines. If we are religious, then we can visit religious institutions, read spiritual texts or meet with others who share our religious beliefs. In difficult times, we can rely on our faith for strength when things seem hopeless. Many people credit their spirituality with many of their successes in life and their ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges. Sometimes simply being grateful can be a way to express

our spirituality. We all have something to be thankful for, no matter how large or small it may seem. Life itself is a miracle to be thankful for.

**Develop Healthier Habits:** When we are busy, although we all realize the importance of maintaining healthy habits, we sometimes fail to do so in our daily lives. However, there are simple changes we can make which will greatly enhance our physical and mental health. This includes exercises such as walking, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, jogging, running, lifting weights, etc. Incorporating regular exercise into our routines will assist with maintaining a healthy weight and will provide us with more energy, vigor and stamina. Reading books and learning about healthy eating options may also motivate us to change our habits as well.

**Include Self-care Rituals:** Because our lives can be very demanding and stressful, self-care rituals can be reinvigorating, relaxing and enjoyable. Therefore, we should incorporate massages, facials, pedicures and manicures into our normal routines. One of the best ways to ensure these rituals become a part of our lives is to make standing appointments and include them on our calendars on a regular basis. This way we can ensure that our self-care is treated as a priority.

**Hire a Professional Coach:** If we are not surrounded by supportive people, we can find it extremely challenging to get ourselves out of difficult situations. Therefore, we may need to compensate a professional who can help us to develop creative solutions for our personal challenges. A professional coach can help us to develop goals and ascend to the next level, both personally and professionally. The right coach will empower us to feel worthwhile and convince us that we have something valuable to offer. He/she will be able to tap into our talents to help us soar.

**Seek Therapy:** Some may believe that people who speak with a therapist may do so due to deep psychological issues. However, there should be no such stigma associated with seeking therapy. Sometimes people simply need assistance to heal from past trauma and to learn how to better cope with their emotions. It may therefore be worthwhile to seek therapeutic solutions

for even seemingly minor issues. As therapy becomes more understood and accepted, more will value the importance of sharing and discussing their issues with others to achieve positive outcomes. To that end, there are many such ways to deal with the anxiety, depression and mental stress associated with practicing law.<sup>5</sup>

Just as we protect the confidentiality of our clients, we can also preserve our own confidentiality and not be hesitant to seek help. The Illinois Lawyers' Assistance Program ("LAP") helps lawyers with addictions to drugs or alcohol. However, even if one is not addicted to substances, one may still want to seek therapy for help with other issues.<sup>6</sup> There are many examples of those who have delayed seeking help even when it was obviously necessary. According to the American Psychological Association, "lawyers are 3.6 times more likely to suffer from depression than nonlawyers." In addition, "the legal industry has the 11th-highest incidence of suicide among professions."<sup>7</sup> Obviously, everyone has struggles at one time or another. Also, everyone who struggles does not have mental illness. Clearly, based on the high incidence of substance abuse, and suicide among lawyers, one's mental healthcare is not an option, it is a priority.

Unfortunately, lawyers are not alone. In fact, physicians die by suicide at twice the rate as everyone else. As you know, physicians and other professionals in the healthcare services industry are called upon to put others before themselves regularly. In order to be good doctors, they often treat patients even if it comes at the expense of their own health and mental well-being.<sup>8</sup> Just as it is incumbent upon attorneys to learn to prioritize our own well-being, those in the medical profession must do the same. The bottom line is that it is okay to say "no" to helping others when saying "yes" comes at the cost of our own mental, physical and/or emotional well-being. At times this may require that we not engage as counsel or disengage as counsel, but it always requires that we abide by the ethical rules of the American Bar Association and the state court rules of professional conduct.

During my professional career, I have often sought the advice of mentors to help

me to achieve different goals. I was ecstatic to learn that there are so many people who are willing to help, if you seek them out. Unfortunately, my mentors did not always make their own health a priority. Two of my mentors died from heart attacks. One of my mentors died from cancer. All of the illnesses were, of course, tragic, but also potentially preventable or treatable. All of my mentors were kind to me, and were hard-working, giving people who were recognized as leaders in their professions and communities. While they shared many admirable qualities, they also sadly shared the inability to prioritize their own health. This illustrates the consequences of not prioritizing our own health and well-being. While I will always be grateful for the positive influences they had on me and who I have become, I will also feel a sense of loss and sadness. However, this sense of loss has also instilled a sense of purpose - to make myself a priority and to inspire others to do so.

So that we can continue to zealously represent our clients, we should take a proactive approach to our physical, mental and emotional health. After all, we owe it to ourselves to make it a priority to seek the best that life can offer. ■

---

*Attorney Sonia D. Coleman, the president of The Law Office of Sonia D. Coleman, P.C., counsels and advises clients on estate planning, probate, real estate, corporate, employment law, and is trained as a mediator and arbitrator.*

*She is a member of many professional organizations such as the Illinois State Bar Association, where she serves on the Labor and Employment, Corporate Law Department and General Practice Solo & Small Firm section councils and Silver Cross Hospital, where she serves on the Board of Directors.*

*Sonia has served as a faculty advisor at John Marshall Law School's Business Enterprise Law Clinic and as a mentor with Loyola University's School of Law Advocacy Mentor Program.*

*She was listed as one of Chicago Southland's Movers and Shakers in Southland Vibe Magazine. She earned her bachelor of science degree in psychology from Howard University and her juris doctorate from Loyola University of Chicago.*

*She started an official podcast where she interviews guests on business and legal issues which people face*

*in their daily lives and is available on most podcast platforms.*

*The information provided reflects the opinions of the author Sonia D. Coleman and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Illinois State Bar Association or its employees. This information is for educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended to be nor should be construed as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please do not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or condition. Consult with your physician prior to altering your diet, ingesting vitamins or supplements, or beginning a new exercise regimen.*

1. <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma>.
2. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/prescriptions-life/201609/self-care-101-you-can-t-pour-empty-cup>.
3. <https://definitions.uslegal.com/c/caregiver>.
4. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/ambigamy/201704/face-it-versus-escapist-coping-strategies>.
5. <https://www.bestlawyers.com/article/mental-health-tips-in-law-industry/2990#:~:text=Despite%20what%20many%20people%20may,not%20know%20what%20to%20do>.
6. <https://illinoislap.org>.
7. <https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/attorney-suicide-what-every-lawyer-needs-to-know>.
8. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/life-style/2020/10/06/doctor-suicide-coronavirus-covid/>.

for efforts to foster understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their issues of concern.

#### **Diversity Leadership Award**

The Diversity Leadership Award recognizes long-standing, continuing, and exceptional commitment by an individual or an organization to the critical importance of diversity within the Illinois legal community, its judiciary, and within the Illinois State Bar Association.

#### **Roz Kaplan Government Service Award**

The Roz Kaplan Government Service Award honors government attorneys whose dedication and service have made a difference. The award recognizes attorneys who, like Roz Kaplan, dedicate their careers to government service.

#### **Human Rights Section Gertz Award**

The Gertz Award recognizes long-standing, continuing, and exceptional commitment by an individual or an organization to the protection or advancement of human rights.

#### **John C. McAndrews Pro Bono Service Award**

The award is named in memory of Rock Island attorney John C. McAndrews, and is awarded to individual lawyers, with 10 years or less of experience, and individual lawyers with more than 10 years' experience, law firms and corporate law departments, and bar associations for providing free legal services to the income eligible in Illinois or expanding the availability of legal services to the income eligible in Illinois.

#### **Joseph R. Bartylak Memorial Legal Services Award**

This annual award honors the extraordinary commitment and dedication of civil or criminal legal services attorneys who have provided the highest caliber of compassionate legal representation and outstanding service to Illinois' vulnerable and low-income population.

#### **Law Enforcement Award**

The Law Enforcement Award was created to recognize sworn law enforcement officers for conduct that promotes justice and to distinguish those individuals whose service

to the public brings honor and respect to the entire criminal justice system. The award is given sparingly to recognize those who truly excel in the field of law enforcement.

#### **Law Student Division Public Service Award**

Awarded annually to a law student participating in activities that enhance professional responsibility and provide service to the public. The award is based on extracurricular accomplishments and service related activities during the law school career.

#### **Legal Education Award**

The Committee on Legal Education, Admissions and Competence has established "The Excellence on Legal Education Award" designed to annually honor a law school program that emphasizes real world skills for students.

#### **Civics Education Award**

The Committee on Law-Related Education recently created this award designed to annually honor up to three individuals who have helped educate the public about civics, especially our legal system.

#### **Matthew Maloney Tradition of Excellence Award**

This award is named in memory of Princeton attorney Matthew Maloney, who was a past chair of the ISBA General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section Council and is awarded to individual lawyers who are in a general solo or small firm practice.

#### **Richard H. Teas Legislative Support Award**

The Legislative Support Award is given in memory of Richard H. Teas, a long-time member of the ISBA Trusts and Estates Section Council, who contributed hours of his own time in analyzing, drafting, and testifying on legislation. Awarded to acknowledge ISBA members' meritorious service provided in support of ISBA's legislative efforts in the Illinois General Assembly.

#### **Young Lawyer of the Year Award**

The ISBA Young Lawyers Division recognizes two outstanding young lawyers – one practicing outside Cook County and

one within – at the annual ISBA awards ceremony. Award recipients must be members in good standing of the Illinois State Bar Association that have not yet reached age 36.

For more information about the individual awards, visit [isba.org/awards](http://isba.org/awards). Nominations are accepted online and via email. Nominations will not be accepted via ground mail or fax. ■