



March 2011
Issue No. 81

IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

BUILDING STRESS HARDINESS

Solutions for handling stress typically come in the form of helpful advice: eat better, exercise more, relax more, and learn how to say no. Although important to an overall strategy, these suggestions do not develop a general resilience in stressful situations. Deep breathing, for instance, *does* have a temporary positive effect on stress as an on-the-spot strategy, but in the long run, building stress hardiness is most effective in developing resistance to the harmful effects of stress.

Research on stress hardiness shows that people who possess certain skills and attitudes are less likely to experience stress and are more likely to respond effectively to changes, problems, and difficult situations. The key “three Cs” of stress hardiness are challenge, commitment, and control. Studies have found that people who believe they can handle life’s challenges, who have a sense of personal commitment to what they are doing, and who feel in control of their lives tend to be resistant to many kinds of illness. On the other hand, those who focus on fear, chronic worry, anger, impatience, unhappiness, and perfectionism are more susceptible to stress-related problems. The legal profession often involves performance under stress, so lawyers, in particular, can benefit from developing stress hardiness.

Challenge

The first attitude of stress hardiness is to approach life as a challenge. This mindset is based on the belief that change is a constant, normal, and positive part of life. People who handle stress successfully tend to see change as something to embrace and master rather than to avoid. They welcome new situations as opportunities to

learn and develop instead of viewing them as potential threats. They believe they can grow from both positive and negative life experiences. This optimistic, “challenging” attitude builds motivation, performance, leadership, and health. This attitude encompasses taking risks, embracing and adapting to change, and meeting life with a “give it your best shot” attitude. People who adopt this attitude see the glass as “half full.”

Commitment

The second attitude that defines stress hardiness is commitment. Commitment gives people a sense of purpose and meaning. It allows them to fully engage in projects and tasks despite stressful changes or circumstances. When people are committed to something, they bring their curiosity and their best effort to their activities. Being fully engaged ignites energy and passion, which lessen the impact of stress. By realizing the important role they play, the positive impact they can have on others, and the meaning in what they do, people can become less stressed, more energized, and more motivated.

Control

The third stress-hardy attitude is a sense of control over your destiny and direction. Individuals with this attitude see themselves as in charge of and responsible for their own lives. They tend not to spend a lot of time complaining or blaming other people and circumstances for their situation. They also have a realistic perspective on their current sphere of influence, focusing their energy and efforts on changing the things they can and accepting the things they can’t. When people make a clear plan of reasonable action for situ-

OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

503-226-1057
1-800-321-OAAP
www.aaap.org

Helping lawyers
and judges for over
25 years

- Alcohol & Chemical Dependency
- Career Change & Transition
- Gambling Addiction
- Mental Health
- Procrastination & Time Management

A free, nonprofit,
confidential program
for you.

ations that they can alter, their stress lessens. Even if things don't turn out exactly how they would like, they feel a sense of accomplishment in having taken steps toward their desired outcome. Additionally, they are likely to believe that they can learn from the experience and will be motivated to continue looking for positive ways they can improve a situation.

Thriving in the Practice of Law

On Thursday, April 7, 2011, the OAAP will present two half-day CLEs to help lawyers and judges increase their resilience for the practice of law.

Stress Hardiness for Lawyers and Judges

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

How can you develop stress hardiness? Nancy Stek, Assistant Director of the New Jersey Lawyers Assistance Program, will identify the attitudes and skills that lawyers and judges can employ to increase their resilience to the stress of the legal profession. Qualifies for 3 MCLE personal management assistance credits.

This CLE is a fundraiser for the Oregon Lawyers Assistance Foundation (OLAF). OLAF provides treatment funds to lawyers who otherwise are unable to afford needed mental health and addiction treatment. Donations are welcomed but not required for attendance. The average cost of a half-day CLE is \$100. A donation to OLAF in any amount is greatly appreciated.

What Lawyers and Judges Need to Know About Compassion Fatigue – And the Strategies to Prevent It

1:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

What is compassion fatigue and why are lawyers and judges at risk for developing it? Mike Long, OAAP Attorney Counselor, JD, MSW, will discuss the signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue and present strategies you can use to prevent it. Qualifies for 3 MCLE personal management assistance credits. This CLE is free.

The seminars will be held at the World Trade Center, 121 SW Salmon, Skybridge Rooms A & B, Portland, OR.

To register, go to www.oaap.org and select CLE/Workshops. For more information about these CLEs, call 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227.

Building Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to rise above adversity or trauma and become stronger as a result of the struggle. It is the ability to cope with stress and develop a “muscle” to handle future negative events – in other words, stress hardiness. The benefits are clear. So how do we actually develop stress hardiness or resilience? One of the key skills is learning how to “reframe” a situation.

Reframing is shifting your focus to the cup being half full. By reflecting on a stressful incident and finding and building strengths from the achievement, you build resilience. Instead of seeing yourself as a helpless survivor, you can reframe an experience to see yourself as an accomplished strategist. Admittedly, being the victim is sometimes easier; it removes the obligation to change. But it is also possible to emerge from difficult situations with dignity and become stronger and more resilient as a result.

Take a closer look at a particularly challenging situation that you have faced and come through. How did you handle it? What did you learn from the experience? How are you stronger as a result? What possible opportunities were created? How might you handle things differently in the future? Reflecting on these questions about past events can help you become more practiced in reframing new situations as they arise.

Reframing does not mean being a Pollyanna or denying the reality of hardships. It is shifting your perspective from seeing only the dark cloud to also looking for the silver lining. As you practice reframing the circumstances and events in your life and your work, you will find that you become better equipped to handle the stresses of life and the law.

If you would like to develop a stress-hardy attitude and work on your resiliency skills, the OAAP is presenting a seminar to help you develop your resiliency. See the box accompanying this article for more information.

NANCY STEK, LCADC

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NEW JERSEY
LAWYERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

This article is adapted and reprinted from the article, “From the Conference: More on Building Stress Hardiness,” Nancy Stek, Highlights, Vol. 12, No. 4, Winter 2010, published by the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs.