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Boost Your Practice by Improving Your Wellness: New ABA Book

Stewart Levine's new book is part of an ongoing trend to push wellness into the legal profession in the wake of eye-opening research showing how pervasive mental health and substance abuse issues are among lawyers.

By **Angela Morris** | August 27, 2018

It's a well-known fact that lawyers suffer at high numbers from mental health and substance abuse problems, and a new book on lawyer wellness drives home a point that might motivate many attorneys to take action.



When wellness permeates an attorney's life, there's a positive impact on his law practice, clients, judges and juries, said Stewart Levine, editor and curator of the recently released book, "The Best Lawyer You Can Be: A Guide to Physical, Mental,

Emotional, and Spiritual Wellness

(<https://shop.americanbar.org/eBus/Store/ProductDetails.aspx?productId=338035232&term=The+Best+Lawyer+You+Can+Be>).

Levine, whose book is published by the American Bar Association, recruited lawyers and wellness experts to pen chapters that serve as a guide toward lawyer wellness, suggesting things such as practicing yoga in the office, eating nutritiously, exercising and giving back through pro bono and volunteerism and building resilience.

The book is part of an ongoing trend to push wellness into the legal profession in the wake of eye-opening research over the past few years that showed how pervasive mental health and substance abuse issues are among lawyers. For example, 21 to 36 percent of lawyers are problem drinkers, 28 percent suffer depression, 19 percent have anxiety and 23 percent are impaired by stress, according to the 2016 study by the American Bar Association Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation.

Law.com spoke to Levine, the founder of ResolutionWorks, a consulting, training and coaching business that focuses on problem-solving, collaboration and conflict resolution, about the book. Here are his answers, edited for brevity and clarity.

What are the most important lessons that you hope that lawyers will incorporate into their lives and practices?

They would realize that law is very, very much an intellectual pursuit and it is completely and fully engaging. If you don't pay attention to taking care of yourself, you're not going to be very effective at helping clients.

There are probably many lawyers who know they ought to make healthy living improvements, but many don't do it. What's the case you're making about why lawyers must embrace wellness to impact their law practices?



Stewart Levine.

If you feel good, you're going to look good and you'll actually project a much more professional image. There's impact on clients, impact on juries, impact on people you meet that could be referral sources. This whole notion of having a vibrant self comes from paying attention to wellness. Somewhere between 70 to 90 percent of communication is nonverbal. What are messages you are giving off if you are not in a state of wellness?

The book delves into emotional intelligence as a cornerstone of lawyer wellness. Why is self-awareness a critical first step?

It's the old story of someone who has an argument with a significant other at home before they walk out the door, and the first thing they do walking out the door is kick the dog, then get into the workplace and snarl at the receptionist, are nasty to an associate. A level of self-awareness would have [enabled you to see]: I've been triggered and agitated and the people I interact with the rest of the day don't deserve the venom. I need to be mindful and self-aware enough to adjust my personal state so I can show up for work as a resourceful person. It's simple, but you have no idea how many people don't have that level of consciousness.

The book explains how engagement is part of emotional intelligence. What are real-world examples of how lawyers can engage more in the practice of law and wider legal profession to pursue wellness?

Engagement is a critical skill for building relationships, creating relationships, creating teams, collaborating effectively, managing conflict and differences. Some of the skills that lawyers learn in being powerful litigators and being combative—they're not

necessarily the best skills for collaborating, for managing a law firm, for being part of a marriage or significant relationship. Having those social or interactive skills are really critical for an effective life and law practice.

How could lawyer wellness change the wider legal profession?

If lawyers have thoughts of well-being about them it could serve to elevate the whole legal profession, and the minds of the general public, in terms of having a greater level of service mentality—being relational and taking care of other human beings. This phrase that always stuck in the back of my mind is: A person with a problem comes to a lawyer and it turns into the lawyer's case. Somehow, that person is lost. Greater levels of well-being and humanity could contribute to greater levels of customer service and taking care of clients—not to mention the impact on the entire legal culture, which not just in my opinion, but the opinion of many, has really deteriorated in the last 25 to 30 years. The practice of law used to be a lot more civil. A sense of well-being could contribute to greater levels of civility in the profession.

Angela Morris is a freelance journalist. Follow her on Twitter at @AMorrisReports