



California Lawyers Association

*presents*

Competency: Reaching Out When Times Get Tough

1.25 Hours MCLE; 1.25 Competence Issues

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1:45 PM - 3:00 PM

Speakers:

**Greg Dorst**

Conference Reference Materials

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# Competency: Reaching Out When Times Get Tough

Lawyers, Substance Use  
Disorders and Wellbeing

# Competency

## Getting Help Before Getting Out of Control

The Problem

Self-Knowledge

Desire to Change

Solutions

Resources

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# Stigma Prevents Attorneys From Accessing Help

Stigma can be defined as:

A label with an associated stereotype that elicits a negative response.

*(National Institute on Drug Abuse)*

# **The Alcohol Problem- Some Definitions:**

**Alcoholism-** antiquated term due to stigma.

**Alcohol Use Disorder-** a pattern of alcohol use that involves problems controlling your drinking, being preoccupied with alcohol or continuing to use alcohol even when it causes problems.

**Alcohol Misuse-** when a person drinks alcohol in a way that's harmful, or when that person is dependent on alcohol in some way, usually socially and emotionally. Binge drinking is often characterized as “Alcohol Misuse”.

# **What is drug addiction or Substance Use Disorder?**

Addiction or Substance Use Disorder, is defined as:

- a chronic, relapsing disorder
- characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite adverse consequences.
- It is considered a brain disorder, because it involves functional changes to brain circuits involved in reward, stress, and self-control.
- These changes may last a long time after a person has stopped taking drugs. Over time the brain heals.

# Self Knowledge: Burnout

Psychologist Christina Maslach of the University of California, Berkeley has been studying job-related burnout since the 1970s. She says burnout is more than the exhaustion that people think defines the experience. Further, **Burnout** is a gateway to alcohol use disorder (AUD), substance use disorder (SUD) and depression.

In fact, burnout has three components:

**Exhaustion** – physical and emotional — like you feel when you've been too stressed at work for too long.

**Feeling of cynicism about work.** You know, it's ... 'take this job and shove it' sort of thing," says Maslach. And you begin to switch from trying to do your very best all the time to do the bare minimum. Moreover, you find that you have negative attitudes about co-workers and clients.

**You start to blame yourself for it.** Thinking, 'What has gone wrong with me?' 'Why am I not good at this?' 'Why can't I handle it?' There is reduced personal accomplishment also described as reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an inability to cope.



# **Substance Use Disorders and Trauma**

Research demonstrates a strong link between exposure to traumatic events and substance use problems. Many people who have experienced child abuse, criminal attack, disasters, war, or other traumatic events, personally or vicariously, turn to alcohol or drugs to help them deal with emotional pain, bad memories, poor sleep, guilt, shame, anxiety, or terror. People with alcohol or drug use problems are more likely to have experienced traumatic events than those without these problems.

## Genetics: What We Know and Don't Know:

*Why do some people become addicted while others don't?*

Finding the biological basis for this risk is an important avenue of research for scientists trying to solve the problem of drug addiction. It is difficult and minimally productive.

Most diseases, including addiction, are complex, and variations in many different genes may contribute to a person's overall level of **risk or protection**. However, the answer to the question may be in how people respond to life's situations. (See trauma and stress)

*In other words, the problem centers in the mind.*

# The American Bar Association & Hazelden-Betty Ford Foundation Study (2016)

## Conclusions:

Attorneys experience problematic drinking (**21%**) that is hazardous, harmful, or otherwise consistent with alcohol use disorders at a higher rate than other professional populations.

Depression (**28%**) and Anxiety (**19%**) are significant issues amongst practicing lawyers

# Self Knowledge: Let's be Honest

- Are you always thinking about “It”?
- Once you start you cannot stop?
- Do you continue to drink despite adverse consequences in your life due to drinking?
  - Health problems
  - Relationship problems
  - Legal troubles

## Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Have you ever felt you needed to **Cut down** on your drinking?
2. Have people **Annoyed** you by criticizing your drinking?
3. Have you ever felt **Guilty** about drinking?
4. Have you ever felt you needed a drink first thing in the morning - **Eye-opener**- to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

# Covid 19 Pandemic

## It changed the way we work and live

- Health Risks
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Alcohol/Drug Abuse
- Loneliness
- Suicide

# Question:

Is it okay with you if your life gets better?

(Willingness/desire to Change)

Planting a seed of change-it is as simple as making a confidential telephone call.

The Other Bar - 24 hours a day:

**(800) 222-0767**

**gdorst2@gmail.com**

## **Some Definitions:**

**Alcohol Use Disorder:** Continuing to drink alcohol despite adverse consequences around drinking.

**Substance Use Disorder:** Continuing to use drugs, prescription or street, despite adverse consequences around their use.

**Gambling Disorder:** continuing to gamble despite adverse consequences around gambling.

**Any Behavior:** continuing to engage in it despite adverse consequences around the behavior.



# Recovery is:

- Physical
- Emotional/Psychological
- Social
- Spiritual



# Lawyer Assistance Program Services:

The State Bar of California

**Assessment**

**Monitoring**

**Support**

**Contact:**     Want to know more? Your call or email is confidential.

Michelle Harmon

Lawyer Assistance Program

877-LAP-4HELP / 877-527-4435

Email: [LAP@calbar.ca.gov](mailto:LAP@calbar.ca.gov)

# Resources

- [www.otherbar.org/resources/](http://www.otherbar.org/resources/)
  - click on resources
- <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Attorneys/Attorney-Regulation/Lawyer-Assistance-Program>
- [www.publichealth.org/resources/addiction/](http://www.publichealth.org/resources/addiction/)
- [www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)
- [www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment)
- [www.drugabuse.gov/](http://www.drugabuse.gov/)
- [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)



## Introducing... Your Brain

The brain is the command center of your body. It weighs about three pounds, and has different centers or systems that process different kinds of information.

The brain stem is the most primitive structure at the base of your brain. The brain stem controls your heart rate, breathing, and sleeping; it does the things you never think about.

Various parts or lobes of the brain process information from your sense organs: the occipital lobe receives information from your eyes, for example. And the cerebral cortex, on top of the whole brain, is the "thinking" part of you. That's where you store and process language, math, and strategies: It's the thinking center. Buried deep within the cerebral cortex is the limbic system, which is responsible for survival: It remembers and creates an appetite for the things that keep you alive, such as good food and the company of other human beings. [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#)

The cerebellum is responsible for things you learn once and never have to think about, such as balance when walking or how to throw a ball.

## How Does Your Brain Communicate?

The brain's job is to process information. Brain cells called neurons receive and send messages to and from other neurons. There are billions of neurons in the human brain, each with as many as a thousand threadlike branches that reach out to other neurons.

In a neuron, a message is an electrical impulse. The electrical message travels along the sending branch, or axon, of the neuron. When the message reaches the end of the axon, it causes the release of a chemical called a neurotransmitter. The chemical travels across a tiny gap, or synapse, to other neurons.

Specialized molecules called receptors on the receiving neuron pick up the chemical. The branches on the receiving end of a neuron are called dendrites. Receptors there have special shapes so they can only collect one kind of neurotransmitter.

In the dendrite, the neurotransmitter starts an electrical impulse. Its work done, the chemical is released back into the synapse. The neurotransmitter then is broken down or is reabsorbed into the sending neuron. [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#)

Neurons in your brain release many different neurotransmitters as you go about your day thinking, feeling, reacting, breathing, and digesting. When you learn new information or

a new skill, your brain builds more axons and dendrites first, as a tree grows roots and branches. With more branches, neurons can communicate and send their messages more efficiently. [1]



## What Do Drugs Do to the Brain?

Some drugs work in the brain because they have a similar size and shape as natural neurotransmitters. In the brain in the right amount or dose, these drugs lock into receptors and start an unnatural chain reaction of electrical charges, causing neurons to release large amounts of their own neurotransmitter.

Some drugs lock onto the neuron and act like a pump, so the neuron releases more neurotransmitter. Other drugs block reabsorption or reuptake and cause unnatural floods of neurotransmitter. [1]

All drugs of abuse, such as nicotine, cocaine, and marijuana, primarily affect the brain's limbic system. Scientists call this the "reward" system. Normally, the limbic system responds to pleasurable experiences by releasing the neurotransmitter dopamine, which creates feelings of pleasure.

## What Happens if Someone Keeps Using Drugs?

Think about how you feel when something good happens-maybe your team wins a game, you're praised for something you've done well, or you drink a cold lemonade on a hot day-that's your limbic system at work. Because natural pleasures in our lives are necessary for survival, the limbic system creates an appetite that drives you to seek those things.

The first time someone uses a drug of abuse, he or she experiences unnaturally intense feelings of pleasure. The limbic system is flooded with dopamine. Of course, drugs have other effects, too; a first-time smoker may also cough and feel nauseous from toxic chemicals in a tobacco or marijuana cigarette. [1]

But the brain starts changing right away as a result of the unnatural flood of neurotransmitters. Because they sense more than enough dopamine, for example, neurons begin to reduce the number of dopamine receptors. Neurons may also make less dopamine. The result is less dopamine in the brain: This is called down regulation. Because some drugs are toxic, some neurons may also die. [1] [3]



NIH Pub. No. 020-3592. Bethesda, MD: NIDA, NIH, DHHS. Printed 1997. Reprinted 1998, 2002. Revised 2000.

4. National Institute on Drug Abuse.

[NIDA InfoFacts: Drug Addiction Treatment Methods](http://www.drugabuse.gov/infobox/treatmeth.html)

(<http://www.drugabuse.gov/infobox/treatmeth.html>):

Bethesda, MD: NIDA, NIH, DHHS. Retrieved June 2003.

## When Everything Changes and We Need Help

Greg Dorst JD, CADC II

All of a sudden, we can't go to the office because we work in crowded buildings and courthouses. Being around other people is unsafe for each of us personally and as it turns out, for those we love. As we temporarily work from home, if lucky enough to do so, we wonder if things will ever return to the way they were before the "disease". How long we can last without new income being generated through new clients? Will there be a need for the type of work that we do? How will the wheels of justice turn in the future and will I financially survive? Living in the grip of uncertainty is nothing less than torture. The brain is constantly creating and updating a set of rules that can predict how your world works and now it is impossible to predict what will happen to us. Scientists and politicians are trying to bring us a sense of safety by recommending community guidelines and precautions but it is clear that none of them can predict what will happen. There are no answers that we can rely upon causing a feeling of a lack of control that is downright debilitating.

Everything about our personal and professional lives has changed. There is no denying that most of us are feeling anxious and are suffering for it, right now. There have been some measurable consequences connected to these uncertain times. Alcohol and drug usage amongst lawyers is skyrocketing and depression has hobbled the ability of many to complete tasks and interact with others. Unhealthy relief from emotional and psychological stress and anxiety ranges from drinking too much and abusing illicit and prescription drugs to pulling the covers up over our heads and refusing to get out of bed. Isolation is a trigger for this kind of behavior which might be exacerbated by cancelled medical and psychological appointments. Suicide and violent behavior is on the rise. Paradoxically, when companionship is most necessary and appropriate for improved mental health and healing, people pull away and isolate.

As a professional who responds specifically to lawyers with these kinds of issues, I have noticed a pronounced increase in requests for help. You, or someone you know may be suffering and are not sure what to do. It is helpful to understand why this is happening, what to look for and what can be done to make career and life saving changes.

On March 16, 2020, Patrick Krill published a timely article at law.com entitled, "In a Year Full of Worry and Division, How to Protect Your Mental Health". The article sets forth [solutions](#) for lawyers experiencing high levels of isolation and loneliness during these uncertain times. As a lawyer and therapist Krill advises:

"Fighting isolation and loneliness amid a broad public health concern might seem more challenging, but the best way to do it is generally the same as in the absence of an outbreak: with intention and commitment. Schedule time to check in (by phone or video) with family and friends and keep the appointment. Even if you're tired, make the calls and give yourself permission to be fully present for the conversations. In a time of increased stress, a sense of connection can be transformative and, for some, lifesaving."

Coincidentally, "Lawyer Well-Being Week", began in early May and was designed to highlight the kinds of skills that are necessary to get through even the toughest of times. The concept that



lawyers may need strategies for successful living that include emotional, intellectual, occupational, physical, spiritual and social toolkits is one that has gained a lot of traction nationally. There is now a [National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being](#) that takes a holistic approach to lawyer wellness. These strategies may prevent troubling behaviors before they become problematic, but for some lawyers out of control behaviors have already taken hold. For some, the pandemic has exacerbated behaviors that used to be somewhat controllable, but now the drinking, drugging and/or depression is having its way. Asking for help to make the necessary changes may be the hardest thing that a lawyer ever has to do. For those who find themselves gripped by alcohol, drugs and/or depression, it is important to know that you don't have to live that way anymore, there is confidential help available. The [Other Bar](#) is a good place to get started on a new path. It is a private nonprofit corporation that helps lawyers, judges and law students to find freedom from addictive disorders and mental health concerns so that they might practice law competently and productively. The organization provides a confidential statewide community of recovering legal minds who help each other to accomplish their goals in a sober and sane way. It is, quite simply a free resource for the legal profession that has helped thousands of struggling lawyers to change their lives for the better.

In addition to the Other Bar, here are some resources that may be instructive and helpful in creating life-saving and career-saving changes to meet the new challenges that all of us are facing during this unprecedented time:

<http://calbar.ca.gov/lap>

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

[www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment)

[www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)

Note: The author is a former attorney and practicing Addiction Specialist and consultant to the Other Bar, working specifically with lawyers, judges and law students who are facing alcohol, drug and mental health issues. Resources are just a phone call or email away: 1(800) 222-0767 or [Gdorst2@gmail.com](mailto:Gdorst2@gmail.com) **All communications are confidential.**