

*High Performance Without Burnout:*  
Practical Well-being Strategies for Lawyers



ERIN CLIFFORD  
WELLNESS COACHING®





## The Reality of Legal Work

- Not a 9–5 profession
- High pressure, high stakes
- Constant demand
- Limited recovery



A recent survey from The International Bar Association's Professional Wellbeing Commission revealed that **the average legal professional is likely to be heading for burnout** and needed wellbeing assistance across geographic regions, practice areas and genders.

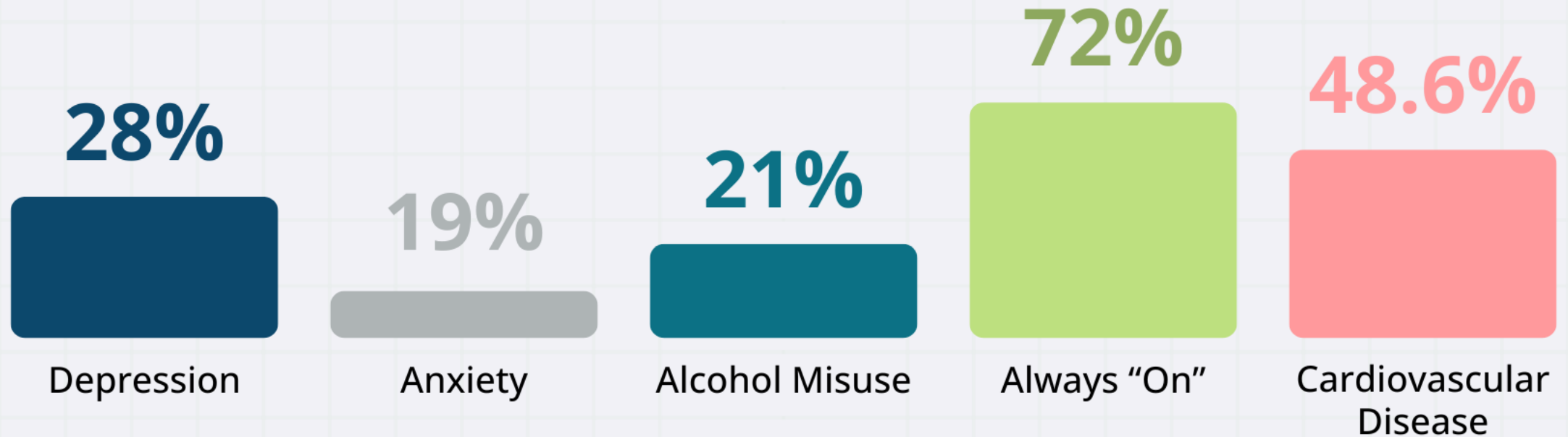
- Higher rates of burnout, depression, and anxiety compared to other professions due to stress, overcommitment, and a culture that normalizes unhealthy coping mechanisms.

*- International Bar Association,  
Mental Wellbeing in the Legal Profession: A Global Study*



According to ALM Intelligence's 2021 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Survey, part of Law.com's Minds Over Matters project, **72% of respondents reported "always being on call and not being able to disconnect" as their top workplace stressor.**

# Lawyer Well-being Data



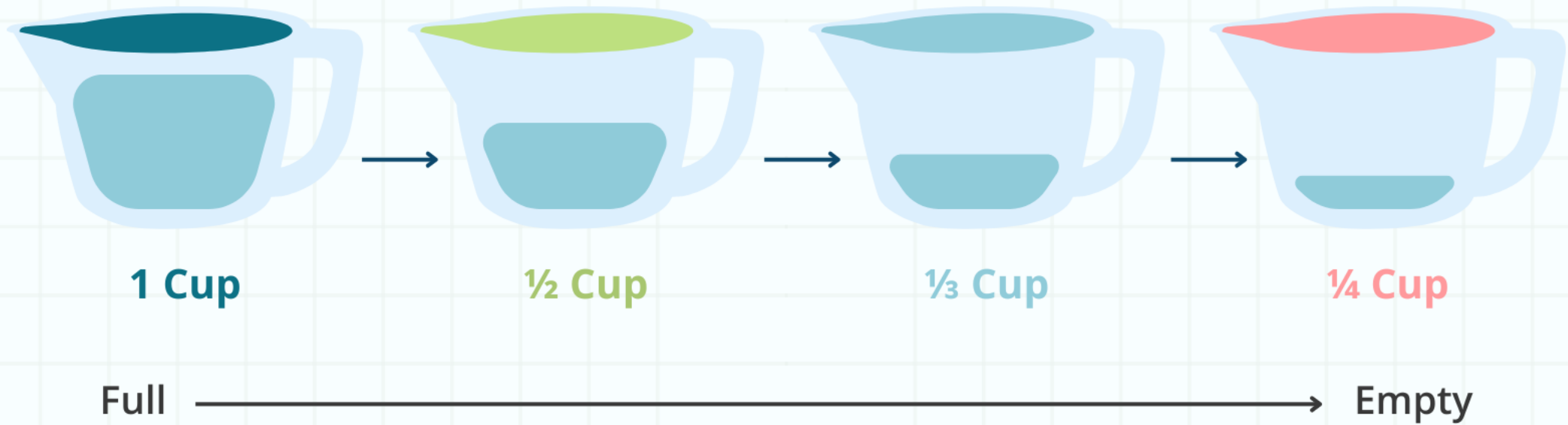


## Burnout Is Real

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout or chronic stress in the workplace as:

- Exhaustion
  - Cynicism
  - Reduced effectiveness
- Can a global push alleviate lawyer burnout?,  
Angela Tufvesson, LJJ Online.

You cannot perform when you are pouring from an **empty cup**.





## Why This Matters for Lawyers

### Burnout impacts:

- Judgment
- Client service
- Retention
- Firm performance
- Mental and physical well-being



## What It Looks Like in the Legal Profession

- Irritability
- Disengagement
- Poor communication
- Overworking
- Overwhelmed



## The Hidden Signals of Burnout in Lawyers

- Sleep disruption
- Fatigue
- Behavior changes
- Mood swings
- Loss of interest
- Physical and mental health concerns



## Real World Lawyer Case Studies

- Substance use
- Health breakdown
- Career impact
- Suicide risk

# POLL

How often do you feel burned out?

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Constantly



# *The Reframe*

Well-being is not just about self-care.  
It is a performance strategy.



## Performance Impacts a Lawyer's

- Focus
- Decision-making
- Client outcomes
- Longevity



## The New Layer of Stress: The Workplace Has Changed

- AI
- Constant connectivity
- Notifications
- Faster expectations
- Information overload



## AI Is a Tool, Not a Replacement

- AI can help with efficiency
- AI can help with research
- AI can help with document review

### **BUT**

- It still requires judgment
- It still requires ethics
- It still requires human oversight

Especially in something as highly specialized as the legal profession...

# POLL

**If AI gave you more time, what would you do with it?**

Spend time with family

Travel

Learn something new

Rest

Keep working

I honestly don't know



*Emotional Intelligence for Lawyers*

Pay attention to your inner world and  
how you show up.

# POLL

**How are you feeling today (1-10)?**

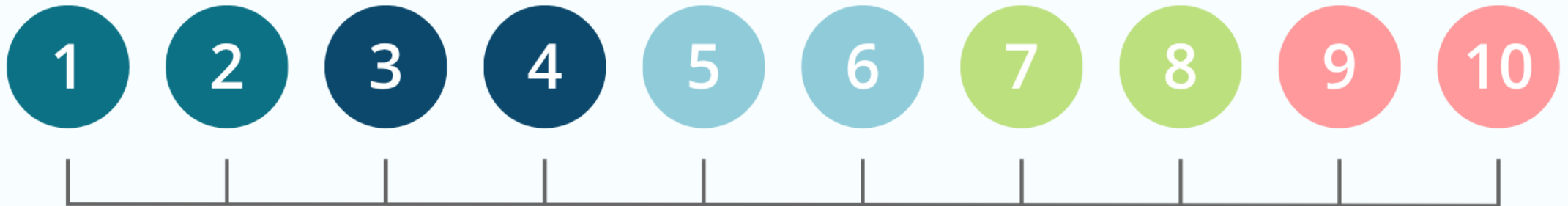
(1 = completely depleted, 10 = fully energized)

# Daily Check-In Tool

1–10 scale

Why not lower?

What moves you up one point?





## How can lawyers ground or reset?

- Breathe
- Music
- Name your state or category
- Sensory techniques
- Set intention



## Boundaries (Reframed)

Boundaries are not saying no.

They are:

- Managing expectations
- Protecting focus
- Making room



## Legal Profession Boundary Examples

- Email response norms
- Client expectations
- Internal timelines
- Moving on



## Micro-breaks for Lawyers (<10 min):

- +40% focus
- Lower stress
- Better cognition



## What Counts as a Break

- **Movement** – walk, stretch, desk exercises
- **Nutrition** – eat without screens, refill your water bottle, pickup carryout
- **Mindfulness** – breathwork, gratitude, puzzle
- **Connection** – talk to someone, coffee break, be curious

# POLL

**What type of break would you actually take?**

Walk

Eat without screens

Talk to someone

Gratitude

Scroll your phone



According to the American Bar Association, legal professionals get fewer than the recommended amount of sleep a night and are among the most sleep-deprived group of professionals.

*- Why sleep is essential for attorneys' well-being and performance. (2024). Thomson Reuters.*



## Sleep Impacts a Lawyer's:

- Judgment
- Focus
- Decision quality

*(Best practice = create a nighttime and morning routine)*

# NUTRITION REALITY

**Common pattern for lawyers:**

☕ Coffee → nothing → bad choices

*Brain uses 20% of your energy*



# POLL

**When was your last real lunch break?**

Today

This week

This month

Can't remember



*Importance of Community and  
Social Connections for Lawyers*



In an 87-year-long Harvard study of Adult Development, researchers found that close relationships and social connections are crucial for our well-being as we age and serve as a buffer against life's stresses and protect overall mental and physical health.

*- Adrian Gostick, (2023). Harvard Research Reveals The #1 Key To Living Longer. Forbes.*

*Isolation*





- Stay connected to the people in your life
- Engage in casual connections for hits of well-being
- Increase your community involvement in bar organizations, philanthropy, book clubs, meetup groups, game nights, running/sports leagues
- Try something new to connect with others
- Use professional supports

A blurred photograph of two women in business attire walking through an office hallway. The woman on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a light-colored blazer and trousers, carrying a pink folder. The woman on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a dark blazer and trousers, carrying a blue folder. The background shows office doors and a modern interior.

*Build a Culture of Well-being*



## What Drains a Lawyer's Performance

- Poor communication
- No boundaries
- Always-on culture
- Not seen as a whole person

## Culture Shift

You don't need a title to influence law firm culture:

- Model behavior
- Respect time
- Encourage openness
- Value and purpose






## Why It Pays Off for Legal Professionals and Organizations

Well-being drives:

- Productivity
- Financial growth
- Retention
- Lower costs
- Resilience

A diverse group of business professionals in a meeting. In the foreground, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a grey suit and tie, is smiling and typing on a laptop. Behind him, a woman with curly hair is looking at the laptop. In the background, other people are engaged in conversation. A white rounded rectangle is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

What is **ONE** thing you will implement tomorrow?



**High performance is  
not about working more.**

**It is about working sustainably.**



*Questions?*



/ERIN-CLIFFORD-WELLNESS-COACH



@ERINWELLNESS



@ERINCLIFFORDWELLNESS



@ERINWELLNESS

Erin Clifford | [www.erincliffordwellness.com](http://www.erincliffordwellness.com) | [Erin@CliffordMail.com](mailto:Erin@CliffordMail.com)

# Resources

Angela Tufvesson. (2024). Can a global push alleviate lawyer burnout?. LJJ Online.  
<https://lsj.com.au/articles/can-a-global-push-alleviate-lawyer-burnout/>

Patrick R. Krill, et al., (2023). Stressed, Lonely, and Overcommitted: Predictors of Lawyer Suicide Risk. Healthcare.  
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9956925/#:~:text=Prior%20estimates%20suggest%20that%20between,in%20U.S.%20population%20%5B6%5D.>

ALM Intelligence's 2021 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Survey, Law.com

Heart Disease Facts, CDC, (2026). <https://www.cdc.gov/heart-disease/data-research/facts-stats/index.html>

Patricia Albulescu, et al. (2022). Give me a break! A systematic review and meta-analysis on the efficacy of micro-breaks for increasing well-being and performance. PLOS ONE.  
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0272460>

# Resources

Why sleep is essential for attorneys' well-being and performance. (2024). Thomson Reuters.  
<https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/blog/why-sleep-is-essential-for-attorneys-well-being-and-performance/>

Marcus E. Raichle & Debra A. Gusnard. (2002). Appraising the Brain's Energy Budget, Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC124895/>

OpenLoop Health, 25+ Compelling Employee Wellness Statistics. <https://openloophealth.com/blog/25-compelling-employee-wellness-statistics>

Adrian Gostick. (2023). Harvard Research Reveals The #1 Key To Living Longer. Forbes.