



President's Report

Michael Bordin

First, a confession: sometimes I simply forget. I forget that I am not an automaton that can sit and work for 9 or 10 straight hours, race off to drive kids to hockey and soccer, get back, eat, make lunches, help with homework, reply to a few more emails, go to bed and start over again; day after day. I forget to look after myself. I forget to breathe.

We all know the stresses inherent in our profession: demanding clients; urgent deadlines; overhead; marketing; the dread when the phone doesn't ring for a few days. An observation from personal experience and anecdotal evidence: the pace and demands of practice have increased substantially in the last 20 years. Our world is now one in which immediacy is paramount: instant communications by email, and text and photos, instant access to vast amounts of information online, and increased pressure from various quarters. While I believe that some stress is essential to success – it gets us up out of bed every day, drives us to excel, and motivates us to achieve – too much is clearly not a good thing.

In recent surveys, members of the Hamilton Law Association have ranked “providing resources for those with depression, substance abuse, or anxiety” as a top priority. The HLA is taking steps to address these concerns in various ways. Among other things, we will begin to provide materials and presentations at CPD events providing resources, advice, and encouragement

for improved mental health and wellness for our members.

This article is meant as a reminder to you and in large part to myself to remember to invest in ourselves and to ensure that we look after our mental, physical and emotional health. Another confession: I am no expert in this and need constant reminding. Here are some things of which I have been reminded in the last months.

Staying active keeps you healthy in many ways. On Wednesday, February 1st, despite an extremely hectic January and impending February schedule I kept a promise and took the day off to take my two oldest daughters snowboarding. This trip has become a tradition – a reward for finishing high school exams. It was a perfect day – just below zero, 6 inches of powder had fallen the night before, hardly anyone on the slopes. At times, it felt like our own personal winter resort. We chased each other down the hills, laughed at our wipeouts and rode the lifts together. I felt alive.

Laughter is the best medicine. On the 7th of February I joined members of the family bar for their annual Groundhog Day event. Jamie Mountford presented the “News”, a 30 minute roast of lawyers, staff and judges of the Hamilton bar. It was a stellar performance. Ben Fortino played the role of the impromptu, interloping

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45 Main Street East, Suite 500
Hamilton, Ontario L8N 2B7
Tel (905) 522-1563 Fax (905) 572-1188
E-mail hla@hamiltonlaw.on.ca

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sports anchor perfectly. Field journalist, Lauren Bale, presented an investigative video report on the Friday afternoon conduct of Hamilton family lawyers, culminating with a “Carpool Karaoke” segment featuring a charming and self-deprecating Justice Chappel. Justice Mazza delivered a brilliant and hilarious deadpan rebuttal. The shared laughter and good natured roasting of the members of the Hamilton bar, including yours truly, was therapeutic. It was my first Groundhog Day. I will be back.

Taking time to relax and engage with people is a great way to relieve stress and address anxieties. On February 23 I attended the HLA’s Young Lawyers’ Social Night at Serve where I mingled, met, and talked to some of the newer members of our bar and was infected by their energy, enthusiasm and laughter. I shared a meal and stories with local solicitors at the HLA’s Annual Solicitors Dinner on March 2. More recently, I did the same at the HLA’s Annual Dinner and was inspired by Michael Winward’s career and receipt of the Emilius Irving Award.

All of these events provided opportunities to share stories, commiserate with colleagues and to laugh at ourselves and each other. They are antithetical to the isolation that can breed ever-increasing levels of stress and despondency. We are hard-working but privileged members of a great profession. We enjoy the benefit of a collegial and considerate bar. Take a break and get out there and enjoy each other’s company.

There are of course other ways to deal with stress. One size does not fit all. Physical activity of all kinds has a beneficial effect on stress levels. Whether you choose to walk, run, bike, swim, workout, or play an individual or team sport, take the time to do something for yourself. Disengage from causes

of stress. Turn off the negative news. Listen to music. It can elevate your mood and make your spirit soar. Dedicate a corner of your office to your favourite piece of art, family photographs, a unique piece of furniture. It can create a mental focal point, a moment of Zen. And sometimes we just need to remember to breathe. Take a deep breath and a moment to think about the positive things in your life and to put into perspective the issues you are currently facing. Finally, take vacations, see the world, read books.

Promise with me to keep reminding yourself to take care of your number one asset. It will make you a better lawyer, spouse, parent and friend. And you will likely find it will lower your stress level too.

Finally, as this is my last article, and the end of my term is near, I would like to express my thanks to all of you and to the HLA staff for your support, encouragement, volunteer hours and participation in HLA events throughout the year. It has truly been a pleasure serving as President of this great association. ■

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#40036029
Return Undeliverable Canadian
Addresses to:
45 Main Street East, Suite 500
Hamilton, Ontario L8N 2B7
E-mail hla@hamiltonlaw.on.ca