

LCL

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, Inc. is a private, non-profit corporation. As the State's sole lawyer assistance program, LCL assists lawyers, judges and law students who are experiencing any level of impairment in their ability to function as a result of addiction, mental health, personal or medical problems.

briefings

LAWYERS CONCERNED FOR LAWYERS, INC.

SPRING/SUMMER 2004

From the director...

PROCRASTINATION AND CHANGE

For the past four years, in order to better reflect the scope of our program and inform our expanded readership, we have devoted each issue of *briefings* to a specific human concern or impairment affecting lawyers (among others). A particularly puzzling problem noted by many lawyers who have spoken to us is procrastination. This pattern of putting tasks off until later (often much later) can lead to frustration and anguish in anyone's life. Within the context of a legal practice, often driven by deadlines and essential preparation, procrastination can make or break a case or even a career.

As usual, we have drawn upon interviews, a review of literature, and our own clinical experience to provide our readers with an overview, a brief bibliography, and some ideas on how to make needed changes. If there is a problem that you are facing, and that you would like to see addressed in *briefings*, please email us at email@LCLMA.org or call us at 617-482-9600.

We also welcome questions for the web-based anonymous version of our Q&A column (at www.LCLMA.org) or the print version published in the *MBA Lawyers Journal*.

A lot is going on at LCL as we prepare to move to our new offices at 31 Milk Street at the end of June. The Board is hard at work to make this organization stronger and better utilized. We are also currently exploring ways to change our image so that lawyers might see our services, not as limited to those with major, stigmatized clinical problems, but in terms of wellness, and prevention, in the face of the full range of life's challenges.

As we face these changes, we all continue to feel the loss of Jim Brink last September, and the leadership that he always provided. His passing leaves a huge void that will take hard work and dedication to fill. I know that LCL's staff, our Board, and our volunteers are committed to the task.

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UPCOMING EVENT

As of June 28th

Our New Office

31 Milk Street
Suite 810
Boston, MA 02109
(617) 482-9600

LCL INTERVIEW - JERRI UDELSON

Jerri Udelson is a personal and business coach who helps lawyers and other professionals with issues such as procrastination, ADD, and poor work and organization problems. She is a Master Certified Coach, whose firm, Entrepreneurial Consulting Services, is located in Cambridge.

What kinds of people become your clients and to what extent do they present procrastination as a key problem? Is there anything special about how this pattern appears in lawyers?

I work with entrepreneurs, professionals (including attorneys, realtors and self-employed business people), and senior managers, helping them stay focused on their main priorities and create balance between their personal and business lives. Many of my clients present poor time management and disorganization as key problems. Upon probing, we often discover that the real issues are poor self-management and procrastination.

Lawyers are not unique, but in many cases they procrastinate when they need to deal with something that probably will have an unpleasant outcome. For example, you might procrastinate on a project in which you don't feel that you are up to the task and don't have time for the learning curve. Or you have an upcoming pleading that will probably result in a ruling that is adverse to your client, so you delay undertaking the work on the pleading. Or you have a difficult client with unrealistic expectations, or the case will be more expensive than anticipated. In these situations, you might procrastinate in order to avoid dealing with the client and the anticipated unpleasant outcome.

What kinds of strategies seem to help with procrastination?

There are a number of strategies: (1) Begin by doing *anything* related to the task at hand. Just by beginning you are creating momentum. (2) "Eat the frog first," meaning, start with the most unpleasant task and get that done first; that success will propel you forward.

(3) My favorite strategy I call the "Sandwich Technique": Begin by allowing yourself to procrastinate for a designated amount of time, say for 1/2 hour, until 11 AM, or whatever. (*The "bread."*) Then, promptly at the designated hour, begin on the task for a certain amount of time, say one to two hours. (*The "meat."*) At the end of the time period, give yourself a small reward. (*The "bread."*)

This technique allows you to procrastinate a bit more, then bite the bullet and work on the task. The reward at the end is reinforcing, as is the fact that you've actually made a significant dent in the project.

When you find that clients are procrastinating on tasks that you, as a coach, have set for them, how do you address that?

First, the client always sets the tasks; the coach provides feedback, strategies, and support, but always working with the client's agenda in mind. If they have been procrastinating, I try to find out if they are really committed to the project at hand. If so, we work on prioritizing the tasks, dividing them into manageable sub-tasks, and figuring out how much time to allot to each piece. I also suggest that clients schedule *specific times* to work on each sub-task by scheduling appointments with themselves in their daily planner or Palm Pilot.

If clients have really not committed themselves to the tasks, we discuss the ultimate goals they wish to achieve, so that they realize *why* they need to work on the particular tasks and how they fit into their overall business plan or life goal. If clients have been procrastinating for a long time on certain tasks, maybe they really don't want to do them, or else they should find a way to delegate them.

"Procrastination makes easy things hard and hard things harder."

Mason Cooley

“Procrastination is opportunity’s natural assassin.”

Victor Kiam

Do you find it productive or counter-productive for others, such as domestic or business partners, to assist people in getting things done?

If a partner has a vested interest in the result, they probably are not the best person to coach the client, since it could be difficult for them to provide useful support in a detached manner. In this case, it’s probably best for the client to find a different form of support, or else delegate the task to a partner.

Is the “last-minute” phenomenon something to be avoided, or is it useful to create “last minutes” as a means of getting in motion?

I personally feel that people don’t work at their best when they are stressed out, exhausted and working off of adrenaline. People, especially those with ADD (attention deficient disorder), often use a tight deadline to energize or manipulate

themselves into action. In the long run, however, I feel this approach is self-defeating. It is healthier for people to learn to plan ahead and work in shorter spurts over time. At the same time, however, I realize it is difficult for people to change unless they are highly motivated to do so.

As a coach, how long do you remain involved? Do procrastinators usually require ongoing boosters, or do they actually integrate and sustain new approaches?

I am involved with clients for as long as they want. My intention is always to help the client develop new approaches so that they are not living on adrenaline and leaving tasks until the very last minute. Partnering with a coach is a powerful way to get support and learn new strategies which, hopefully, will eventually become integrated as new habits and ways of working.

PROCRASTINATION BIBLIOGRAPHY

Do It Now! Break the Procrastination Habit, Revised Edition

by Dr. William J. Knaus (John Wiley & Sons, 1979, 1998).

Psychologist Dr. Knaus blends theory and experience to develop awareness and promote practical action strategies that help the reader tackle the roots of their procrastination problem.

It’s About Time: The 6 Styles of Procrastinating and How to Overcome Them

by Dr. Linda Sapadin with Jack Maguire (Penquin, 1996)

A clinical psychologist specializing in helping people change behavioral patterns, Dr. Sapadin uses real life examples to describe how these 6 patterns manifest, their common and interrelated characteristics of thought, beliefs and behaviors, and practical strategies for change. Self-tests are included that help you to identify your own patterns.

The Procrastinator’s Handbook: Mastering the Art of Doing It Now

by Rita Emmett (Walker & Company, 2000).

Professional speaker (and former confirmed procrastinator) whose Conquering Procrastination Seminars have been attended by high-profile clients, offers light-hearted procrastination-busting tips and techniques.