

Mental health and wellbeing for lawyers

by Practical Law In-house

Toolkit | **Maintained** | Australia

A toolkit to guide users through Practical Law's content addressing mental health and wellbeing issues in the legal industry and for legal professionals. Content is set out by topic and includes resources relating to personal effectiveness, benefits of effective communication, developing higher emotional intelligence, the impact of the **COVID-19** pandemic on mental health and wellbeing in the legal profession, the importance of making wellbeing a priority, managing stress and mental health at work and practising mindfulness.

Scope of this toolkit

Personal effectiveness

Barriers to personal effectiveness

Overcoming self-doubt and the phenomenon of "imposter syndrome"

Building confidence with effective communication skills

Preparing for public speaking events

Developing higher emotional intelligence

Impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing

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Making wellbeing a priority

Managing stress and mental health at work

Practising mindfulness

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Law societies and bar associations

Minds Count Foundation

Black Dog Institute

Scope of this toolkit

This toolkit is a guide to Practical Law's resources dealing with mental health and wellbeing issues for the legal industry and legal professionals.

Mental health and wellbeing is a significant issue for the legal profession, given the nature of the work required and the responsibilities of legal professionals. More recently, the [COVID-19](#) pandemic has presented new challenges and changes which have affected the way legal professionals practise law.

Law firms and organisations within the legal industry are considering how the pandemic has affected the profession, including the mental health and wellbeing of practitioners. For example, the Law Society of New South Wales (NSW) has commissioned Heartward Strategic to conduct research with its members to better understand how these changes have impacted legal practitioners in NSW. In its *Research Summary Report – The Law Society of NSW, A Fair Post-Covid Justice System: Canvassing Member Views* (Report), published in January 2022, key findings were summarised from a quantitative online survey sent out to all current members of the Law Society of NSW between 13 July 2021 and 4 August 2021. A key finding from the Report was that the second highest rated change impacting legal workplaces since March 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic, was the negative impact on staff mental health and wellbeing (49% of those surveyed said that the pandemic had a negative impact on staff mental health and wellbeing: Figure 7, Report). The Law Society of NSW concluded that more effort was required to support members and is aiming to continue to provide valued mental health and wellbeing support in future. Members surveyed were keen to receive support in the following areas:

- Advice and guidance on managing the increasing blur between work and homelife.
- Strategies on how to deal with isolation.
- Assistance with putting downward pressure on the pace and level of workload during the pandemic.

Throughout this toolkit, there are a variety of key themes and resources that provide insightful perspectives, guidance, and helpful tips on how lawyers can manage their mental health and wellbeing and how organisations can ensure their employees and legal departments are supported.

For a list of helpful resources for lawyers transitioning from private practice to an in-house role and the skills and mindset they should adapt, see [Toolkit, New to in-house](#).

Access to the resources listed in this toolkit depends on what is included in your Practical Law subscription. To find out more about Practical Law or upgrade your access, contact our [Customer care team](#).

Personal effectiveness

There are a number of core skills of personal effectiveness that can be developed to improve an individual's performance and career success. In *Adapting for 21st Century Success: The Delta Lawyer Competency Model*, developed by Thomson Reuters, personal effectiveness encompasses:

- Relationship management.
- Entrepreneurial mindset.
- Emotional intelligence (see [Developing higher emotional intelligence](#)).
- Communication (see [Building confidence with effective communication skills](#)).
- Character.

Barriers to personal effectiveness

Mental health, stress and wellbeing have significant impacts on an individual's ability to develop personal effectiveness and often present barriers which limit personal effectiveness. For an overview of personal effectiveness and core skills that can be developed to improve an individual's career success and personal growth, see [Practice note, Personal effectiveness: an introduction](#).

For more information on how barriers to personal effectiveness can be overcome, see [Practice note, Overcoming barriers to personal effectiveness](#).

Overcoming self-doubt and the phenomenon of "imposter syndrome"

Imposter syndrome is a phenomenon which causes an individual to doubt their skills and accomplishments and struggle with the constant fear of being exposed as a fraud. It affects significant numbers of professionals, especially in high-achieving industries such as the legal profession.

It is important to recognise the symptoms of imposter syndrome and how to overcome self-doubt, where an individual feels inadequate, has a negative view of their abilities and cannot accept or recognise their achievements. For more information on the imposter syndrome, how it impacts mental health and how to address it, see [Article, Imposter syndrome: the silent struggle of the over-achieving lawyer](#).

Building confidence with effective communication skills

Effective communication is often cited as the most important soft skill for in-house lawyers. Lawyers interact daily with their work colleagues, clients and business connections, as well as with family and friends. By improving their communication skills, individuals can enhance their performance in many aspects of their daily life and indirectly improve their mental health and wellbeing.

For helpful resources that highlight the importance of good communication in the legal profession and the workforce generally, see:

- [Article, In Practice: How to bring purpose & culture to life at work](#).
- Practice notes:
 - [Communicating effectively: building assertiveness skills](#).
 - [Communicating effectively: fundamental skills for lawyers](#).
 - [Communicating with colleagues effectively](#).
 - [Practical tips for new in-house lawyers: Communicate effectively](#).
 - [Soft skills for in-house lawyers](#).

For more information on how to communicate effectively with business partners, build trust and influence within an organisation, see *Practice note: Engaging effectively with the business: communication, trust and developing influence*. See also *PowerPoint presentation: Engaging effectively with the business: communication, trust and developing influence*, which can be used for training and continuing professional development (CPD) purposes.

For more information on the importance of personal and professional development for lawyers, including how it can improve communication skills, see *Practice note, Personal and professional development for lawyers: an introduction*.

For more information on building effective and productive relationships, see *Practice note, How to build effective and productive relationships: a guide for lawyers*.

Preparing for public speaking events

Effective communication is important when preparing for public speaking events, which are a common feature of many lawyers' working lives. Organising and speaking or presenting at a training event or training session can be a stressful experience for many, especially where a larger audience is present.

For practical tips to prepare for a public speaking event and steps to consider before presenting, see:

- *Checklist, Preparing for a presentation.*
- *Practice note, Presentation skills: the basics.*
- *Practice note, Soft skills for in-house lawyers: Presentation skills.*

Developing higher emotional intelligence

Developing a higher level of emotional intelligence (EQ) is a key skill in maintaining high levels of mental health and wellbeing. Being aware of emotions will impact how we filter and process information, how we engage with others and how we perform day-to-day tasks. Given lawyers engage with many people during their daily lives, it is important that they be aware of their EQ.

For a list of resources which explain the importance of EQ for lawyers and how to build skills in personal and social competence, see Practice notes:

- *Emotional intelligence: an introduction.*
- *Emotional intelligence: building your skills in personal competence.*
- *Emotional intelligence: building your skills in social competence.*
- *Emotional intelligence: case study exercises highlighting the relevance of EQ for lawyers.*

For more information on the importance of enhancing emotional agility, particularly for in-house lawyers managing and influencing many different stakeholders, see *Practice note, The Modern GC and the "More for Less" Dilemma* and *Article, Why so emotional?*.

Impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant challenges and changes to the way modern legal marketplaces operate. The transition to remote working and working from home has meant many have had to balance work and life responsibilities and manage stresses brought about by ongoing development of the pandemic.

In a *Report* conducted by Hartford Strategic for the Law Society of NSW in January 2022, although members surveyed were generally positive about the impact of the pandemic on courts, legal practice and the workplace, the findings showed that mental health and wellbeing of staff was significantly affected, as one in four said the pandemic had a negative impact on the way they practised law (see *Scope of this toolkit* and *Law Society of NSW: Legal Profession Keen to Retain Covid Changes to Justice System*).

There has also been an increased use in digital platforms to adjust to working remotely, which has required many organisations and its employees to learn new digital skills and change their methods of completing legal work. Some employees have welcomed the flexibility of remote working, and it is expected that many organisations in the legal industry will adopt hybrid work structures (see *Adjusting to remote work*).

The pandemic has nevertheless brought significant emotional, economic and workplace challenges for many. Transitioning to a post-pandemic world will likely require adjustments to work and life as new developments take place and changes implemented during the pandemic are maintained.

For useful tips and strategies on dealing with anxiety, finding balance and maintaining wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, see:

- *Article, Blog post: Dealing with anxiety, finding balance and maintaining wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- *Legal update: archive, New International ISO standard released to address workplace mental health concerns.*

Adjusting to remote work

Most organisations transitioned to remote working arrangements at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many suggesting this work structure is here to stay. Hybrid working arrangements are likely to be a feature of many industries and are being implemented in many workplaces, given some of the benefits of remote work for organisations and employees.

For helpful resources to assist lawyers who are making the transition to remote work on a more regular basis, see:

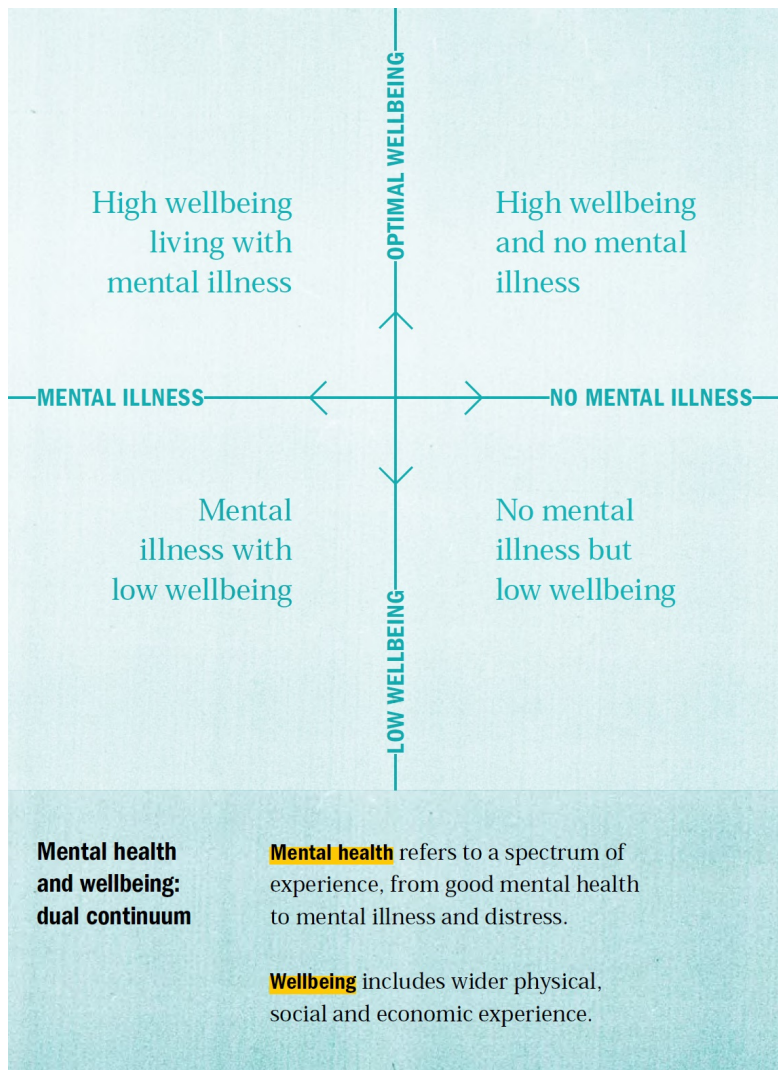
- Articles:
 - *Continuing to work from home? Five good habits to implement now.*
 - *How lawyers can find work-life balance in a hybrid workforce.*
 - *When working remotely as a lawyer, stay on track by avoiding these six bad habits.*

- *Practice note, Remote work for in-house lawyers.*
- *Checklist, Staying focused while working remotely.*
- *Practice note, Working effectively from home for the long term.*
- *Legal update: archive, COVID-19: resources to help you keep well and work effectively.*

Making wellbeing a priority

Wellbeing is about finding balance in all aspects of a person's life and involves a complex combination of mental, social and emotional factors that affect whether a person is able to develop a sense of comfort, health and happiness.

The connection between wellbeing and mental health can be illustrated by the following grid, from *Step Change: mentally healthy universities*, which shows a dual continuum:



In the workplace, where employees are mentally healthy it is more likely to be a positive and productive environment. Individuals who prioritise their mental health and wellbeing are more likely to produce better outcomes in terms of work performance and productivity, build positive relationships with colleagues and clients, and have a positive attitude towards their job.

Managing stress and mental health at work (see [Managing stress and mental health at work](#)) can help with ensuring we maintain a sense of wellbeing. To help make wellbeing a priority it is important to consider the role of mindfulness in people's daily lives (see [Practising mindfulness](#)).

For more information on how to improve mental wellbeing in the legal profession and start conversations in a workplace about stress and wellbeing, see [Practice note, Mental health, stress and wellbeing in the legal profession: an introduction: Improving mental wellbeing in the legal profession](#) and [Starting conversations about stress and wellbeing in your team and organisation](#).

For more information on the importance of promoting wellbeing within an organisation, see:

- [Article, In Practice: How to bring purpose & culture to life at work](#).
- [Article, In Practice: How Cisco's purpose & culture help drive employee engagement & well-being](#).
- [Practice note, Improving the mental health of in-house lawyers: Promote wellbeing within the organisation](#).

For a perspective on how sleep and daily lifestyle habits can affect a person's sense of wellbeing, see Articles:

- [Why sleep is essential for lawyers' wellbeing and performance](#).
- [Mind your gaps: Are you making wellbeing a priority?](#)

For helpful information, resources and support on wellbeing and workplace wellbeing published by the [Black Dog Institute](#), see [Black Dog Institute: Wellbeing](#) and [Black Dog Institute: Workplace wellbeing](#).

Managing stress and mental health at work

Numerous studies have shown that law is regarded as a particularly stressful profession, due to its culture of long working hours, high client expectations and complex work tasks. Periods of prolonged stress can lead to a range of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, and physical health issues.

Recent efforts have been made by the Law Societies in each state and territory to assist lawyers with managing their mental health, and other support services have been made available. The Law Council of Australia has made it a policy agenda and has developed a Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Legal Profession [portal](#) to provide a centralised source of information about mental health for the legal profession (see also [Where to get immediate help](#)).

For an introductory overview of the important issues for lawyers around mental health, stress and wellbeing at work, see [Practice note, Mental health, stress and wellbeing in the legal profession: an introduction](#).

For tips on how best to manage work-related stress and mental health issues at work, see Practice notes:

- [Improving the mental health of in-house lawyers](#).

- *Looking after your mental wellbeing to avoid harmful stress: the six habits of resilience and wellbeing.*
- *Managing pressure to avoid harmful stress: the importance of self-awareness.*

For helpful guidance on how employers or managers can improve mental wellbeing for themselves and their employees, as well as the benefits of implementing a wellbeing program and strategies within their organisation to address mental health, see:

- *Practice note, Workplace stress: six habits to help you meet your management responsibilities.*
- *Video and audio, Mental health: a holistic approach for employers.*

Practising mindfulness

Practising mindfulness involves allowing thoughts, feelings and sensations to come and go without judgement or the need to do anything with them. There are many benefits of mindfulness, including lowering stress levels, restoring emotional balance, increasing resilience and reducing anxiety. It can also improve sleep quality, reduce fatigue levels and improve concentration, all of which are vital to improving productivity levels in the workplace.

For an understanding of the nature of mindfulness and its relevance for lawyers, see *Practice note, An introduction to mindfulness: the mindful lawyer* and *Article, Mindful business charter: re-imagining our ways of working.*

For tips on how to establish a morning routine, practising mindfulness and how mindfulness can be incorporated within a routine, see Articles:

- *Creating mindful cadences between the phrases of life.*
- *How do you know if you have a mindful lawyer?.*
- *The importance of a morning routine.*
- *The lawyer is present.*

Where to get immediate help

Lifeline is Australia's national charity providing all Australians experiencing emotional distress with 24 hour crisis support and are advocates for mental wellbeing. For more information and to get help, see <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/> or call 13 11 14.

If your life or someone else's life is in danger, phone 000 immediately.

Law societies and bar associations

The Law Council of Australia's mental health and wellbeing [portal](#) lists the mental health and wellbeing assistance services provided to solicitors and barristers by the various state law societies and bar associations.

Minds Count Foundation

The *Minds Count Foundation*, is an independent, charitable organisation with the objective of decreasing work-related psychological ill-health in the legal community and promoting workplace psychological health and safety. Organisations can become signatories to its Guidelines.

The Minds Count website also contains links to various mental health and wellbeing [research](#).

Black Dog Institute

For helpful information, resources and support on wellbeing and workplace wellbeing published by the *Black Dog Institute*, see *Black Dog Institute: Wellbeing* and *Black Dog Institute: Workplace wellbeing*.

Several law firms in Australia partnered with the Black Dog Institute in 2010 to produce the *Resilience@Law Legal Profession Mental Health Toolkit*, as well as the video series 'Staying Well in the Law'.

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Related Content

Practice notes

- [Personal effectiveness: an introduction](#) • Maintained
- [Overcoming barriers to personal effectiveness](#) • Maintained
- [Communicating effectively: building assertiveness skills](#) • Maintained
- [Remote work for in-house lawyers](#) • Maintained
- [Mental health, stress and wellbeing in the legal profession: an introduction](#) • Maintained
- [Improving the mental health of in-house lawyers](#) • Maintained
- [Looking after your mental wellbeing to avoid harmful stress: the six habits of resilience and wellbeing](#) • Maintained
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[Presentation skills: the basics](#) • [Maintained](#)
[The Modern GC and the "More for Less" Dilemma](#) • [Published on 16-Mar-2022](#)

Checklists

[Staying focused while working remotely](#) • [Maintained](#)
[Preparing for a presentation](#) • [Maintained](#)

Articles

[Blog post: Dealing with anxiety, finding balance and maintaining wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) • [Published on 20-Mar-2020](#)
[When working remotely as a lawyer, stay on track by avoiding these six bad habits](#) • [Published on 06-Mar-2022](#)
[In Practice: How Cisco's purpose and culture help drive employee engagement and well-being](#) • [Published on 16-Mar-2022](#)
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[Mind your gaps: Are you making well-being a priority?](#) • [Published on 06-Mar-2022](#)
[Mindful business charter: re-imagining our ways of working](#) • [Published on 16-Mar-2022](#)
[Creating mindful cadences between the phrases of life](#) • [Published on 15-Mar-2022](#)
[How do you know if you have a mindful lawyer?](#) • [Published on 15-Mar-2022](#)
[The importance of a morning routine](#) • [Published on 06-Mar-2022](#)
[Imposter syndrome: the silent struggle of the over-achieving lawyer](#) • [Published on 16-Mar-2022](#)
[In Practice: How to bring purpose and culture to life at work](#) • [Published on 16-Mar-2022](#)
[Why so emotional?](#) • [Published on 15-Mar-2022](#)
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[How lawyers can find work-life balance in a hybrid workforce](#) • [Published on 06-Mar-2022](#)

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Video and audio

[Mental health: a holistic approach for employers](#) • [Law stated as at 09-Oct-2019](#)

Legal update: archive

[COVID-19: resources to help you keep well and work effectively](#) • [Published on 06-Apr-2020](#)
[New International ISO standard released to address workplace mental health concerns](#) • [Published on 04-Nov-2021](#)
[Thomson Reuters releases 2022 State of Corporate Law Departments Report](#) • [Published on 31-Mar-2022](#)

Imposter syndrome: the silent struggle of the over-achieving lawyer

by Practical Law In-house

Articles | [Published on 16-Mar-2022](#) | Australia

An article addressing imposter syndrome, which is a phenomenon that causes an individual to doubt their skills and accomplishments and struggle with a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud. The article discusses the prevalence of imposter syndrome within the legal profession and its effect on lawyer wellbeing and performance. It also offers strategies that legal employers, managers and individual lawyers struggling with imposter syndrome can use to reduce and prevent it.

Imposter syndrome among lawyers

Effect on wellbeing

Limits potential

Strategies for addressing imposter syndrome

How legal employers can address imposter syndrome

How managers and supervising lawyers can address imposter syndrome

How individual lawyers can address imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome (also referred to as imposter phenomenon) is a psychological pattern in which an individual doubts their skills and accomplishments and has a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud. The psychologists Pauline R Clance and Suzanne A Imes coined the term "imposter syndrome" in the 1970s but imposter syndrome is not a clinical psychiatric diagnosis. However, many suffering from imposter syndrome also suffer from anxiety and depression.

Imposter syndrome can affect anyone, even those who have achieved unparalleled success in their field. Some of the most well-known individuals who have reportedly struggled with imposter syndrome are Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Maya Angelou, Tom Hanks, Michelle Obama and Albert Einstein. Despite clear evidence of their achievements, individuals suffering from imposter syndrome cannot internalise their success. They instead remain convinced that they do not deserve what they have achieved, attributing their success to luck instead of their intelligence, talent or hard work.

Research to date has not uncovered any single cause of imposter syndrome. It has been associated with:

- Being raised in a highly achievement-oriented family.
- Lack of physical representation in certain settings, which can cause members of underrepresented groups to feel like they are "other" or do not belong.

- Racist and sexist stereotypes, which can cause individuals to internalise critical voices that undermine their abilities.

Symptoms of imposter syndrome include:

- Feelings of inadequacy.
- Fear of being unmasked and revealed as a fraud.
- Having a distorted and overly negative view of one's abilities.
- Being unable to internalise and accept one's accomplishments.

Because the biggest fear of those with imposter syndrome is being found out, these individuals typically suffer in silence. With effort, however, imposter syndrome can be effectively addressed.

Imposter syndrome among lawyers

Imposter syndrome is common in competitive environments among high achievers whose self-worth is tied to their external accomplishments. It is therefore not surprising that it is widespread among lawyers.

In recent years, industry associations have emphasised the important role that legal organisations can play in creating a culture that better supports the health, wellbeing, and proficiency of their lawyers. For example:

- The Law Society of New South Wales (NSW) has commissioned Heartward Strategic to conduct research with its members to better understand how these changes have impacted legal practitioners in NSW. In its *Research Summary Report – The Law Society of NSW, A Fair Post-Covid Justice System: Canvassing Member Views* (Report), published in January 2022, key findings were summarised from a quantitative online survey sent out to all current members of the Law Society of NSW between 13 July 2021 and 4 August 2021. A key finding from the Report was that the second highest rated change impacting legal workplaces since March 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic, was the negative impact on staff mental health and wellbeing (49% of those surveyed said that the pandemic had a negative impact on staff mental health and wellbeing: Figure 7, Report). The Law Society of NSW concluded that more effort was required to support members and is aiming to continue to provide valued mental health and wellbeing support in future.
- The Law Council of Australia has made it a policy agenda and developed a Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Legal Profession [portal](#) to provide a centralised source of information about mental health for the legal profession.

Confronting imposter syndrome is one concrete step that legal organisations can take to advance this goal. Neha Sampat, the chief executive officer of GenLead|BelongLab, has developed a variety of programmes designed to address imposter syndrome both within and outside the legal community. Despite many legal organisations' claims that imposter syndrome is not an issue for their lawyers, Sampat's programs are filled to maximum capacity with lawyers telling a different story.

Sampat explains the apparent disconnect as the product of "a culture in which vulnerability is often seen as weakness. Lawyers are therefore reluctant to admit that this is a problem for them. Some do not even admit it to themselves." In fact, some managers attending Sampat's inclusive leadership workshops as part of their organisation's leadership training program discover that they themselves have experienced imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome can both:

- Negatively affect a lawyer's wellbeing.
- Prevent a lawyer from living up to their full professional potential.

Effect on wellbeing

While every lawyer experiences lapses in confidence or feels out of their depth from time to time, for lawyers with imposter syndrome, the self-doubt can be constant and unrelenting, and is frequently accompanied by anxiety and depression. Many people suffering from this condition work tirelessly to prove their value, only to discover that it is never enough.

One former BigLaw associate described her daily struggle like this:

"Every time the phone rang, and it rang probably 20 times a day, I thought that this could be the phone call in which I would be exposed as a fraud. My colleague or my client would realise that I was not as smart or capable as they thought. They would finally realise that I had been pulling the wool over their eyes."

Imposter syndrome's reach in the legal world extends beyond law firms. For one in-house lawyer, imposter feelings come in waves and can be crippling. For him, imposter syndrome arises when he reflects back on work he previously completed, causing him to second-guess his work product. He also frequently compares himself to others and when his career does not advance as quickly as he would like or as quickly as someone else's, he assumes that others do not regard him highly, and that they must be right.

As lawyers with imposter syndrome rise up through the ranks and the stakes get higher, the struggle can intensify. One former BigLaw partner said:

"Making partner made everything worse. There was so much that I didn't know that I felt I should know. The pressure was unrelenting."

Left unchecked, some may burn out and leave their jobs. Others may stick it out but suffer internally.

Limits potential

Imposter syndrome may also prevent a lawyer from reaching their full potential. The self-doubt may cause them to:

- Not share their ideas or speak up during meetings.
- Not volunteer for high-profile assignments.
- Become maladaptive perfectionists who either:
 - procrastinate (due to overwhelming fear); or

- overprepare (because they believe overpreparing is the only way they can succeed).
- Not pursue counsel, partnership or other career opportunities.
- Leave their jobs.

The end result is negative not only for the lawyer, but also for the legal organisation that does not receive the full value of its investment in the lawyer's talent.

Strategies for addressing imposter syndrome

There is no single approach for addressing imposter syndrome. Because it is triggered, at least in part, by behaviours that routinely surface in competitive, high pressure working environments, the burden should not be placed solely on the individual lawyers affected. Sampat emphasises the need for a multi-pronged approach focusing on strategies that both:

- Disrupt or reduce imposter syndrome once it exists.
- Prevent it from occurring in the first place, largely through cultural change.

Legal employers, managers and supervising lawyers and individual lawyers affected by imposter syndrome all have important roles to play in effectively addressing imposter syndrome.

How legal employers can address imposter syndrome

There are many actions legal employers can take to address imposter syndrome, including:

- **Acknowledge imposter syndrome.** The first step in addressing imposter syndrome is acknowledging it as a source of distress in the legal profession. This lays the foundation for everything else. In her workshops, Sampat's first steps are to:
 - address what is imposter syndrome;
 - identify the problems imposter syndrome causes; and
 - normalise it to reduce the shame those struggling with it may feel.

For some struggling with imposter syndrome, it is a relief the first time someone gives a name to what they are experiencing. Realising that others struggle with it too brings comfort, as they no longer feel alone.

- **Hold workshops or other programs.** By holding workshops that raise awareness of imposter syndrome, organisations can both dilute the shame that affected lawyers feel, and provide a framework they can use to address it, which helps to reduce imposter syndrome throughout the organisation.
- **Create and foster a supportive environment.** A supportive environment in which lawyers believe that the organisation cares about their wellbeing, values their individual contributions and wants them to succeed is a crucial part of preventing imposter syndrome. When discussing organisation culture, many lawyer wellness promoters refer to the importance of "tone at the top". However, it is important to recognise that there is not just one "top". Rather, each

individual who supervises someone else or reviews someone else's work product is the "top" for that individual. The right tone must, therefore, be established within each layer of the organisation.

- **Focus on diversity and inclusion.** Lawyers are less likely to feel like imposters if there are other people they can identify with and relate to within the organisation. While imposter syndrome can affect anyone, being the only female lawyer or lawyer of colour at a firm or on a team can make the lawyer feel that they do not belong, which may contribute to imposter syndrome.
- **Ensure adequate professional development training.** Assigning projects to lawyers for which they are unprepared because they do not have the appropriate skill set or substantive foundation both:
 - results in the delivery of poor work product and client dissatisfaction; and
 - feeds imposter syndrome.

Because lawyers often receive complicated assignments with short turnaround times (and often via email with no context or opportunity to ask questions), ensuring that they have the substantive background and tools needed to perform the work is essential. A comprehensive professional development programme that enables lawyers to fill in gaps in their knowledge and constantly improve their skill set builds confidence and may help to both reduce and prevent imposter syndrome.

- **Place the right people in managerial roles.** Being a great lawyer or having a big book of business does not necessarily mean that someone will be a great manager or leader. Ensure that people in managerial roles are:
 - encouraging and supportive; and
 - provided with training on being effective managers and leaders, working with different personality types, and identifying and addressing imposter syndrome.
- **Offer mental health support.** Ensure that lawyers have access to mental health resources, such as lawyer assistance programs, employee assistance programs (EAPs) and confidential access to mental health experts. These programmes can be effective tools for addressing imposter syndrome as well as a host of mental health and substance abuse issues that are widespread within the legal profession.

How managers and supervising lawyers can address imposter syndrome

Managers and other supervising lawyers also play a key role in addressing imposter syndrome. Actions they can take include:

- **Regularly check-in with lawyers on their team.** In addition to creating a supportive environment, asking how team members are doing provides an opportunity for them to speak up about their imposter feelings. This is particularly important when team members are working remotely.
- **Assign work thoughtfully.** Combining stretch projects and projects that play to a lawyer's strengths can be a good way to both:
 - create a foundation of confidence; and

- promote professional growth.
- **Provide regular, constructive feedback.** Regularly providing constructive feedback is important for lawyer development generally. For those struggling with imposter syndrome, it provides an opportunity to:
 - emphasise the lawyer's specific strengths and how they add value to the team; and
 - identify areas that need improvement, together with concrete actions the lawyer can take to improve and ultimately succeed.
- **Demonstrate humility by sharing personal fears and mistakes.** Every manager or supervising lawyer has likely made their share of mistakes. Sharing personal stories about making mistakes and getting past them can help to alleviate the perfectionism that those with imposter syndrome struggle with, as it emphasises that failure is not fatal.
- **Create reasonable standards and timelines.** While client deadlines and demands cannot always be changed, where possible, try to manage client expectations and set reasonably attainable standards and deadlines. Unreasonable expectations feed imposter syndrome by sending the message that no matter what the lawyer does, it is not enough.
- **Encourage self-care.** Encourage lawyers on the team to take breaks and engage in activities that help them to reduce stress and re-charge whenever possible. Sometimes even a 15 minute walk or meditation can significantly calm the mind, enabling the lawyer to pivot back to their work with a clearer head.

How individual lawyers can address imposter syndrome

To overcome imposter syndrome, the affected lawyer must develop a personal toolkit of strategies they can implement when needed. If you are struggling with imposter syndrome, try the following:

- **Acknowledge and critically analyse the imposter voice.** Everyone has an inner critic. Try to step back and analyse this voice as an impartial observer. For example:
 - if struggling with self-doubt regarding a particular assignment, ask yourself why the project was assigned to you and what unique skills you bring to the project; and
 - if struggling with general feelings of inadequacy, consider your achievements and ask yourself what you would think of someone else with the same credentials.
- **Attend workshops and other programmes.** If your employer or another organisation offers a workshop on imposter syndrome, consider participating so that you can learn strategies for disrupting your imposter syndrome. Sambat's workshops focus not only on addressing imposter syndrome, but also building evidence-based confidence or "lawyering yourself out of your limiting thoughts".
- **Use words that connote respect and compassion.** Because words matter, just as you should be respectful and compassionate with the words you use when talking to others, you should demonstrate the same respect and compassion when speaking to yourself.
- **Adopt a growth mindset.** When your inner critic causes self-doubt or when you receive a stretch project or constructive feedback, try to adopt a growth rather than a fixed mindset. When you have a fixed mindset, you assume that your

abilities are static, that is, you are not capable of changing them in a meaningful way, whereas when you have a growth mindset, you thrive on challenge and view failure as an opportunity to grow and develop new skills. A growth mindset can help you to challenge your imposter feelings.

- **Stop comparing yourself to others.** Teddy Roosevelt once said that "comparison is the thief of joy" and that can be true when you compare yourself to people who are on a completely different trajectory than you. Try to rid yourself of the comparison habit.
- **Mentor and train others.** In addition to helping others grow, teaching less experienced lawyers can be a good way to reinforce how far you have come by shifting the focus from what you do not know to how much you do.
- **Remind yourself what you are good at and what you have accomplished.** No one is good at everything. But reminding yourself of specific accomplishments and positive feedback you have received can build confidence. For busy lawyers who are often unable to cross anything off of their daily to-do lists due to unanticipated client emergencies, consider creating a list setting out all of the things you did accomplish during the day.
- **Share your feelings with trusted friends or supportive mentors.** Recognising that others have experienced the same fears (most people have experienced imposter syndrome at some point in their lives) can be comforting. If others understand your struggle, they are also more likely to offer encouraging support when you need it.
- **Try to eliminate perfectionist patterns.** If your perfectionism causes you to get easily overwhelmed and procrastinate, resolve to start your next project early. If instead you overprepare, set a limit on the amount of time you will spend on a project. It may take time but you can train yourself to gradually change your patterns.
- **Visualise your success.** Top athletes visualise themselves succeeding. The same strategy can be effective in increasing your belief in yourself at work. So picture yourself succeeding at difficult assignments that cause you to question yourself.
- **Celebrate your victories.** It may seem easier to punish yourself for your perceived shortcomings and mistakes than to celebrate your victories. Try to accept your victories as accomplishments rather than gifts and celebrate them.
- **Talk to a trained therapist.** A trained therapist may be able to help you break the cycle of imposter thinking.
- **Recognise your personal signs.** Just because you have worked on your imposter syndrome and lessened its impact does not mean that it will never return. It is important to recognise your patterns so that you can quickly address any instances of imposter syndrome that may occur.

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