

Taking care of yourself

in tough economic times

by John Starzynski

This article is not about dealing with your investments or securities in the current global economic crisis. Many articles in many media address what you should do financially. This is not one of those. Instead it deals with what you can do for yourself in self-care – emotionally, physically, spiritually and in terms of wellness – to help you weather the tough and stressful times we are in.

At OLAP (Ontario Lawyers Assistance Program) we've seen an increase in callers upset about the global economic crisis. Much money has been lost, including retirement savings. Some callers are coping (or really not coping) by misuse and abuse of substances – alcohol and drugs. Others are consumed with the Internet, spending huge amounts of time surfing, chatting and exploring websites and not doing the basic things like eating, or grooming. Depression, lethargy, unexplained and baseless medical complaints such as headaches and migraines, panic attacks, skin rashes, phantom heart attacks are not unusual; stress is taking its toll too on relationships with family and friends. We all know someone, or ourselves, who is not coping very well right now.

Let's talk about what we can do to care for ourselves.

Physically, your mother was right. Eat three meals a day, get eight hours of sleep a night and exercise at least three times a week. Food is our fuel and energy to function. If we do not eat three meals a day, we deprive our body, especially our most valuable resource, the brain, of the

fuel it needs to carry on as optimally as possible. Follow the Canada Food Guide for a balanced diet. Having snacks during the day keeps the energy levels up. Ten to twelve almonds at each of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. gives you the protein boost that gets you through to your next meal. Eight (not eighty) walnuts a day will give you your daily quota of essential oils. Nuts are good energy food but they have a lot of fat if you are worrying about your weight. Snack on fruit and vegetables and get natural sugars. Ergo, cut down on added sugar in your diet, especially if diabetes is a concern. Cut out fast, greasy food. Your heart will love you for it.

Exercise keeps the body and mind in top shape. Moving gets the blood flowing and nourishes the brain with oxygen-filled blood. You do not have to be a professional athlete to exercise at least three times a week for a half hour each time. Here is a non-complete list of some ideas that may help. Walk to your office. At lunch, take a half hour power walk without talking on the phone. Walk up the stairs rather than taking the elevator, if possible. Play organized sports such as volleyball, hockey or baseball. Jog. Run. Have sex regularly – it is great exercise and clears the mind. Mud wrestle – okay, it is my attempt at humour and I'm checking if you read this far. Stretch your neck, arms and shoulders at your desk often. Keep as supple as you can. Do yoga or pilates.

Cut out or cut down on smoking. No judgments meant here. See www.smokershelpline.ca (Canadian Cancer Society) and

www.lung.ca (Lung Association). Cut out or cut down on caffeine. Drink lots of water to hydrate your body and help deal with cravings. Cut out or down on alcohol – there is lots of information on our website – www.olap.ca. There are lots of support groups – Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous and many more. We can connect you.

When you are really under a lot of stress, close your door, sit down with both feet on the ground, put your hands palms down in your thighs and BREATHE deeply three times in through the nose out through the mouth in an o-shape. Turn the phone and crackberry off. Face away from your computer. All this should help relieve the tension in your neck and shoulders. Try to make your mind a blank. Do this for three minutes and consider it a gift to yourself and a brief, well-deserved holiday. Drink lots of water to keep your body hydrated.

Finally, go to your doctor for a complete physical checkup including blood work. Address any physical concerns you may have so that you can be assured that you are functioning well. This will serve to also give you peace of mind.

Emotionally, it is important to have ongoing support and if possible, daily support. Have a close friend or confidant that you can share your troubles, dreams, triumphs and daily life with. Keep a daily journal so you can monitor your moods and thoughts.


Get emotional support when you need it – go to a psychologist, therapist or psychiatrist if you need it. OLAP can help by getting you short-term counselling and a peer support volunteer. Call 1-877-576-6227.

Make time for leisure and don't take work into your home environment. Listen to soothing music in the car rather than the news which is chock full of negative stimuli. Get a dog. At least someone should be happy to see you when you finally get home and a dog will necessitate exercise. Hug and kiss your partner, children and parents every day and tell them that you love them – this never gets old. Laugh a lot and watch comedy movies to get a belly laugh. For a daily chuckle, call 1-800-424-2424 (1-800-HAHAHAHA)

Prioritize what you need to do in your life. Do what matters most first. This involves life or death issues getting top priority. Then look at your roles in life – spouse, parent, child, etc. Are these number two? Make time for this priority BEFORE you put in work, exercise, etc. These items become non-negotiable especially if you live your life in actual fact making your family the most important thing in your life and treating the priority that way. I am not diminishing the importance of work. You must decide personally where it fits in your priority scheme and adjust your time commitments to meet that priority.

Spirituality does not necessarily mean religion. Some people practice religious rites. Others believe in a higher power without a formal structure. Whatever you believe, connect with your inner self through reflection, meditation and self-examination. Review your ethical beliefs and see how you stack up. Look to your future and how you will get there. Make a plan for your life so that you

OLAP understands lawyers.



OLAP reaches out to lawyers.

ANNOUNCEMENT

OLAP is excited to announce to the profession the formation of a brand new mutual aid group for lawyers dealing with family pressures, practice or career stress, mental health and addiction. The group offers something for lawyers every stage of the recovery and healing process. You are enthusiastically invited to come, participate, encourage, receive support, teach, learn, grow and heal. This is of special relevance and interest to OLAP volunteers whose individual role is emulated and expanded upon in this supportive group setting. We look forward to seeing you there. Meetings will be held on the first and third Thursdays of each month.

All Lawyers are Welcome
Share your experience dealing with mental health issues, addiction or the stress of practice.
Offer support and encouragement to others.
Find strength and ideas for coping.

THESE GROUP MEETINGS ARE CONFIDENTIAL
The group will be facilitated by OLAP Volunteers with the support of OLAP staff.
Come and Bring a Friend

Please contact Catherine Hendrick at 905 238-1740 or email catherine@olap.ca

know that you have actually thought about it and are not just drifting through life without direction.

Read great literature with noble themes and actions. Take a course that will feed your soul and tap into your inner resources – painting, golf, music, etc. Volunteer in activities you enjoy and make you feel that you are making a difference by serving others. Write a personal Mission Statement to identify who you are, what you believe in, where you are going and how you are going to get there. This is a powerful exercise and cuts right to the heart of your being.

Always, when you need to talk, call OLAP. We have 75 peer support volunteers across the province who will lend you a non-judgmental supportive ear. We have all had challenges and can share our experience, strength and hope with others.

Resources

Credit Canada has a lot of information at www.creditcanada.com. The Credit Counselling Service of Toronto is at 416-228-3328. Lawyer Stanley Kershman, one of our peer volunteers, has written an excellent book: *Put Your Debt on a Diet*.

The Wellness page on the practicePRO website (www.practicepro.ca/wellness) has a number of health and balance self-assessment tools.

To contact the Ontario Lawyers Assistance Program, call Leota Embleton, MSW, Program Manager, Doron Gold, LLB, Personal Coach, Case Manager and Terri Wilkinson, LLB, RN, Case Manager at 1-877-576-6227. To contact John Starzynski, LLB, Volunteer Executive Director, call 1-877-584-6227. The website is www.olap.ca.