

DRI For Life: “Never Again!”

By Anonymous DRI Member

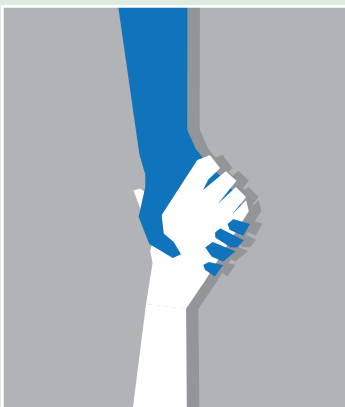
“Most people in the grip of depression at its ghastliest are, for whatever reason, in a state of unrealistic hopelessness, torn by exaggerated ills and fatal threats that bear no resemblance to actuality. It may require on the part of friends, lovers, family, admirers, an almost religious devotion to persuade the sufferers of life’s worth, which is so often in conflict with a sense of their own worthlessness, but such devotion has prevented countless suicides.”

—William Styron, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*

Through 2013 and most of 2014, I suffered from chronic severe depression. It got so bad, that every morning on my drive to work I would look at a lake that abutted the highway and thought to myself it would be so easy to let my car drift right, off the highway, onto the gravel, through the tall grass, and into the lake. By the time my survival instincts kicked in, I would be submerged, along with my depression. As the drivers around me listened to their music and talk radio, thought about their days, and dreamed about their weekends, I thought about ending it all. I can’t speak about how depression seizes others, but it seized me in a vice grip that wouldn’t let go.

It was late 2014. Work had suffered. My family had suffered. All my relationships had suffered. My health was poor. I was either not sleeping or sleeping too much. I had gained weight and lost it and gained it back again. I was grinding my teeth to the bone. My mega doses of antidepressants were causing more problems than they were solving. Often, the side effects to antidepressants are mild, if any. I was the exception. They caused me to have muscle spasms and lack of coordination. I couldn’t walk down stairs and my gait was off. I shuffled or stumbled instead of walked. I looked around one day and asked myself,

“How did I get here?” “How did I end up here, where had I thrown everything away and couldn’t function?” A 2015 study, co-funded by the American Bar Association and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, based on a sample of 12,825 U.S. attorneys who completed surveys assessing alcohol use, drug use, and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, found that 61 percent reported concerns with anxiety at some point in their careers and 46 percent reported concerns with depression. The study revealed significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among at-



torneys reporting problematic alcohol use: “While some individuals may drink to cope with their psychological or emotional problems, others may experience those same problems as a result of their drinking.... The ubiquity of alcohol in the legal professional culture certainly demonstrates both its ready availability and social acceptability, should one choose to cope with their mental health problems in that manner. Attorneys working in private firms experience some of the highest levels of problematic alcohol use compared with other work environments....” The study concluded that “depression, anxiety, and stress are...significant problems for [lawyers].”

Warning Signs

When interacting with lawyers in your office, keep an eye out for the warning signs in others, and in yourself, as noted by the National Institute of Mental Health.

- Loss of interest in most all activities
- Loss of pleasure or enjoyment in what were enjoyable activities
- Thoughts of death or suicide

- Fatigue
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Increased use of alcohol
- Significant weight gain or weight loss
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness

How to Help

When you recognize depression in your attorney friends, reach out and help. The Institute and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline have some tips.

- Recognize the symptoms.
- Get the person to a professional for appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Don’t assume that someone else is taking care of the problem. Encourage or help the individual to make an appointment with a professional. Encourage them to stay with treatment until the symptoms begin to abate.
- Offer emotional support, understanding, patience and lend an ear.
- Take remarks about suicide seriously. Most persons who commit suicide provide some warning to a friend or family member. Don’t ignore him or her and don’t agree to keep them confidential.
- Invite them to activities to keep them engaged. Encourage him or her to pick up old hobbies that once provided them pleasure.

Depression is a serious illness. Left untreated it can lead to suicide of a dear friend or loved one. When you encounter it, help others face it and seek treatment.

When I realized how far gone I was, it was as if a light had gone off. I wasn’t going to give into the depression anymore, not one more day. I worked with my therapist to get my medications working right for me. I engaged my family. I focused at work. And by the time I was celebrating Christmas with my wife and our two boys on our vacation, winding down 2014, the depression had mostly evaporated. I still take my medications. I still struggle with depression. But my rallying cry became “never again.” I will never let myself become who I was. So broken. So hopeless. So lost. Never again.

My family’s help and concern helped me find the help I needed. Your concern and help may stop someone from driving into the proverbial lake.

