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Perspectives: Lawyers and Marijuana

We recently had the opportunity to talk with some lawyers who agreed to share their experiences in using and in trying to stop using marijuana. Below are some of their comments – how and when they started using, how their use progressed, and what they did in meeting the challenges they faced with their pot use.

When did you start using and what was your early use like?

- I was 16 when I first started smoking pot.
- I started smoking at 17 right before my senior year in high school.
- At first, I wasn't using daily, but it slowly, gradually progressed.
- At the start, I felt like my use was casual; I simply used because I wanted to, not because I had to. (Or at least that's what I told myself.)
- Initially, I resisted using any drugs other than alcohol. I had a family member who was a drug addict, and I told myself I would never be like that person. However, I found myself using pot at a party, and I felt it gave me many of the same benefits as alcohol, but without any of the negative consequences.
- Pot made me feel like I fit in. It made everything seem better ... family problems, social anxiety; basically it calmed the discomforts of life.

Did you use in college/law school?

- By the time I got to college, and throughout law school, I was using pretty much every day. I got good grades and didn't really see my pot use as a problem with my studies. I felt like I was "high functioning" and could do well despite my increasing pot use.
- During my college years, I was arrested for possession and also was involved in a vehicular incident where someone was hurt, but this did not impede my pot use.
- During my law school orientation, I remember a faculty member talking about life issues including addiction. We were told, "If you're using a drug that you started using recreationally and it now has control of your life, you should contact the OAAP." The words resonated with me and gave me some hope ... but I still wasn't ready to stop.
- I only applied to law schools in those states where pot was legal.
- My tolerance was definitely increasing – I kept needing to use more and more. By this time, I was using mostly edibles and oils because of

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the higher THC concentrations. I even had THC sugar packets for my coffee.

How did your using progress as a practicing lawyer?

- Once I became a lawyer, my use continued to increase. I told myself that my pot use was mainly stress-related.
- By the last time I tried to quit, I was smoking several times throughout the day. It had become a ritual.
- I experimented with edibles and vaping, but found smoking gave me the kind of high that I felt like I needed.

What were one or two of the primary factors that encouraged you to stop using pot?

- I just felt like my use was totally out of control.

- Family and friends were telling me that I smoked too much.

- I felt like my pot use was affecting my personal relationships, including my family relationships. I felt I wasn't as present as I should have been and wanted to be.

- As my pot use increased during my practice, it seemed like I was turning inward and becoming more and more isolated from the people around me.

- When my pot use was at its highest, I found I was working less at the office.

- I felt isolated; I didn't care about much of anything.

Had you tried to stop using before?

- I had tried to stop a few times, but never for very long.

- Yes, I'd tried to stop before. But my efforts generally had less to do with me actually wanting to stop

OAAP Statement to the Community about Groups and CLEs

We are sending this notice to let you know about OAAP groups, CLEs, and event changes we are making in response to community health concerns.

The Oregon Attorney Assistance Program cares deeply about the health and safety of our community. We are actively monitoring COVID-19 updates from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>) and the Oregon Health Authority (<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASESCONDITIONS/DISEASESAZ/Pages/emerging-respiratory-infections.aspx>), and we are developing our response plan as recommended by these authorities, and we are aware that these conditions are changing rapidly.

The current policy of the Professional Liability Fund and Oregon Attorney Assistance Program *requires us to meet remotely for groups where that is a possibility and to cancel other groups and 12 step meetings through the end of April 2020*. Please contact OAAP group facilitators and attorney counselors directly with questions at www.oaap.org or 503.226.1057.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to participate live at speaking engagements or CLEs. We are cancelling the OAAP/OWLS Wellness Retreat, which would have taken place April 17-18th in Sunriver.

Our office remains open and all of our attorney counselors are available for individual appointments. We are happy to meet with you by phone or in person or by video conferencing and encourage you to call at any time. We are here to assist the members of the legal community. We hope that the safety protocols we are putting in place will be helpful in serving the community.

Please feel free to call or contact us by email with questions. www.oaap.org

Sincerely,

Shari R Pearlman, LCSW, JD on behalf of the OAAP

OAAP Assistant Director / Attorney Counselor

and more because of external pressures, like fear of being caught or being tested.

- I tried a few times to stop. In law school, I contacted an OAAP attorney counselor. I got a few weeks of clean time, felt OK, and thought I was “fixed” and I could use again. So I did, and it wasn’t long until I was right back to where I had been before.

Did you have challenges getting into recovery? If so, what got in your way?

- The main thing that kept me from quitting pot was just plain inertia.

- I looked at a treatment program years ago, but it was too expensive. I never tried going to 12-step meetings, primarily because I thought that was only for alcoholics and addicted people off the street, not someone like me. It was only later that I found out how wrong I had been about 12-step meetings.

- Once I decided to get help, it really wasn’t that hard. I contacted the OAAP and worked with one of their attorney counselors.

- I kept saying, “I can handle this by myself.”

- Even though I knew what I needed to do, I basically just wasn’t ready to stop my pot use.

- I did not get into recovery when I probably should have. I resisted and delayed to avoid seriously doing anything about my pot use. I just isolated and self-medicated.

- Initially, I told myself that perhaps my pot use over the years had changed my brain chemistry, and maybe I needed THC on a daily basis just to feel normal.

What kinds of things, activities, and/or practices do you do to maintain your recovery?

- Trying to get regular exercise and going to my MA (Marijuana Anonymous) meetings. I average about two meetings per week.

- I have learned to ask for help when I need it.

- 12-step meetings are probably the focal point of my recovery. They are a really important part of my life today.

- Many of my friends are in recovery and that’s very supportive for me.

- I do pro bono work in the community.

Did You Know? The OAAP Offers Help for ...

- Problem substance use
- Recovery support
- Burnout and stress management
- Career transition and satisfaction
- Depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues
- Compulsive disorders including gambling, sex, and Internet addiction
- Procrastination
- Relationship issues
- Retirement planning
- Time management

- I seek outside help, which means I talk with my counselor at the OAAP about professional and recovery-related issues. I also have a therapist for other issues.

- I have a recovery “sponsor,” someone who is in longer-term recovery and is available for me to talk with and be supportive and encouraging.

- One thing I’ve learned is that my recovery must be a priority in my life. I am in a long-term personal relationship, and have a career that I like and where people depend on me. I even just got a puppy. I need to keep in mind that I wouldn’t have any of those things if I went back to using.

Has your life in recovery affected your personal relationships and/or your professional life? If so, how?

- Primarily, I’m more present with the people who are important in my life. And I feel better about myself because I addressed my problem.

- First of all, I actually have relationships now. Prior to recovery, I lived alone, and I didn’t have many friends. I had pushed family away and those relationships became frayed.

- In recovery, prior relationships that had become problematic gradually began to heal. I became

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more willing to be part of other people's lives and let them in. I actually met my partner in recovery. I'm able to be present for my extended family, even though we live far apart.

- In my professional life, I find I get more work done.

- In recovery, I have learned how to have healthy relationships with my professional colleagues, co-workers, and clients. I've learned to be more flexible, to learn from my colleagues, and to be better able to talk candidly with my clients. I think they respect that. Respect is not something I thought I could get when I was using, but now I feel it's possible.

What have you noticed most about how life was/is different for you in recovery?

- Simple: It feels good not to be under the control of a habit.

- One thing for me that has changed is that I find I have a more positive view of myself. I no longer have a worldview that the glass is always half empty – today I am more positive about life.

- I'm more focused on what I can give rather than what I can get. As part of my recovery, I get to work with other people who are struggling. I find this very rewarding.

Are there any tips you would give to a lawyer considering getting into recovery?

- Overcoming an addictive or habitual use of drugs is generally something you cannot do on your own. "Find your tribe" – find others who are struggling with the same issues or problems and who are coming together seeking recovery.

- Explore the recovery meetings at the OAAP, recovery meetings like Marijuana Anonymous (MA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

- Trust your intuition. If you think that you might have a problem, seek the help that's available, whether that's individual counseling, treatment, or 12-step programs.

- Give yourself a chance. When using, I lacked imagination as to what my life could be in re-

covery. I didn't know I could live without drugs and alcohol. I thought I needed them to be social, to quiet the noise in my head. I learned I really didn't need these substances. A sober life is a life worth living.

Our special thanks to the lawyers who shared their perspectives with us.

OAAP has four confidential recovery meetings every week for Oregon lawyers, judges, and law students. www.oaap.org. Call 503.226.1057 or 800.321.6227.

DOUGLAS S. QUERIN, JD, LPC, CADC I
OAAP ATTORNEY COUNSELOR

BRYAN R. WELCH, JD, CADC I
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Finding Meaningful Work

"Finding Meaningful Work" is a six-session networking and support group for lawyers making a job or a career transition. The group will start on Thursday, April 9, 2020, and will meet consecutively at noon (12:00 p.m.) every Thursday. Due to concerns about the coronavirus, this group will be held remotely. Topics are designed to help lawyers create and execute a personalized job search plan; develop a mission statement and elevator speech; learn and practice networking skills; and hone their job search skills. The initial group session will involve attendance at the OAAP brown bag series, "Lawyers in Transition," to be held the same date and time, also remotely. The OAAP will feature guest speaker(s) who have made their own career transition(s). Additional information for "Lawyers in Transition" will soon follow.

The group will be facilitated by OAAP Attorney Counselor Karen Neri, JD, MA-MCFC Candidate. To participate or for more information about remote access, please contact Karen at 503.226.1057, ext. 11, or at karenn@oaap.org.

The Introvert Lawyer's Guide to Networking

A few years ago, a meme that I found hilarious circulated the internet. It read “Introverts of the world unite! Separately. In your own homes.” That meme is both true and not true, and maybe that’s why it is funny. It is true because introverts tend not to like large group activities, but it is also not true because it doesn’t mean they can’t do the things that we tend to categorize as activities for extroverts. I’m a trial lawyer, I love public speaking, and I am an introvert. Networking is a part of professional life for most lawyers, even introverts like me. Over the years, I’ve picked up some strategies that have allowed me to do the networking I have to do to advance my practice without draining myself or causing too much suffering. Here they are.

1. Follow Your Passion

In *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain identifies Eleanor Roosevelt as an introvert. Yes, the indomitable and expectation-defying First Lady is classified as someone who preferred quiet life and enjoyed solitude or small groups. How did Roosevelt manage to do the work she had to do as First Lady? Cain posits that she followed her passion. In other words, Roosevelt was motivated to positively impact the world and drew courage and inspiration from that. There’s a good lesson here for all of us. Networking for lawyers does not have to follow any set path. To do it well, you really just need to get out of your office and engage with the community. Find a cause that matters to you or even something you just find fun and go for it. When you really believe in a cause or just enjoy an activity, you will likely find it much easier to handle large group activities or even public speaking.

2. Know the Power of One

Networking often gets conflated with attending networking events, like happy hours, but that is not the only way to do it. Introverts are experts at the inner life so we may be better at finding ways to deeply connect with people in a way that others will remember for a long time. Capitalize on this skill! In particular, don’t underestimate the value of one-on-one or small group lunch dates. Don’t forget that your book club with a few friends is still network-

32ND ANNUAL DINNER FOR LAWYERS, JUDGES, AND LAW STUDENTS IN RECOVERY

Please join the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program on Friday, May 15, 2020 at the 32nd Annual Dinner Celebrating Lawyers, Judges, and Law Students in Recovery at the Hotel Monaco in downtown Portland from 6:00 to 9:30 p.m.

For a registration form or more information, call the OAAP at 503.226.1057 or 1.800.321.6227. The deadline to RSVP is Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Dinner is \$40 per person.



ing. The goal of networking is to expand your social circle and build your reputation with new people. If you keep at it, consistently and over time, you will expand your reach substantially even if you meet only a few new people at a time.

In fact, you don’t even have to leave your office to expand and tend to your network. One of my favorite things to do is to write notes to friends and contacts. This may seem small but can have huge benefits. In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell discussed the impressive social network that one well-known connector developed in part by sending birthday cards to all of the loose contacts he developed in his daily life. In other words, networking does not have to be big and flashy. If it is consistently and authentically done, small acts over time can help even the quietest of introverts develop an impressive and loyal social network.

3. Grin and Bear It

As we all know, nothing worthwhile ever comes easy. Thus, at a certain point, most lawyer introverts are going to have to learn to deal with larger social events at least part of the time. If you treat yourself with compassion and keep trying, this will eventually get easier. Early in my practice, I hated going to networking events because it made my feeling of being a kid play-acting at being a lawyer go into overdrive. I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t know what

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to say. And it just felt awkward and awful. My answer: I joined the happy hour committee with my local chamber of commerce and eventually chaired it. As a committee member, it was my job to not only attend but also welcome new attendees. I found that, because it was my job, it was a lot easier to approach new people and start conversations. With practice and over time, I built skills and new contacts. After a few months, the conversation was effortless and even fun. In other words, introversion is a tendency, but it doesn't have to be a destiny. With time and attention, you can build skills and confidence that make large social interactions much less challenging and more fun.

4. Remember to Recharge

I have to return to Susan Cain here because her book is one that all introverts should read since her definition of introversion is the best I've heard. She defines introverts as people who in general crave less – not socialization – but stimulation. This often translates as an avoidance of large social activities because those tend to be the circumstances in which introverts may become over stimulated, worn down, or grumpy. In large social gatherings, there is stimulation galore: activity, noise, and the stress of coming up with things to say.

When I went through leadership development programs, I often jokingly called the sessions an “introvert’s nightmare” because we would travel around in groups of 40 or more all day, without any real break, and often in close quarters. I loved the people in these programs, but this was exhausting. The thing that helped me the most was making a concerted effort to recharge whenever I had the

chance. If we got even a short break, I would go meditate or take a quick walk by myself. If we didn't, I brought headphones and took 5 minutes to meditate or listen to calming music on the bus. These small breaks helped me rest and recharge so I did not get overstimulated and could enjoy the rest of the activities. You don't have to meditate necessarily, but if you can find a way to relax (i.e., manage your intake of stimulation) before or after large social activities, it may help you be present for and enjoy them more.

In short, networking is something introvert lawyers can and should do. But networking for introverts may not look exactly like networking for extroverts. And you know what? That's okay. All lawyers must find a style of practice that works for them, so it makes sense that we all must also find a style of networking that suits our personalities. In sum and to borrow from another meme, I say to my fellow introvert lawyers, keep calm and network.

CLAIRE E. PARSONS

MEMBER, ADAMS, STEPNER, WOLTER-
MANN, & DUSING, PLLC

This article was originally published April 25, 2018, for Ms. JD. Reprinted with permission.

Share Your Experience

You can help other Oregon lawyers by sharing your personal experience of managing or recovering from behavioral or mental health issues like chronic stress, depression, anxiety, or problem substance use; or in dealing with challenges like grief, loss, or family changes. Your stories and comments will be anonymous. Submitted stories may be published on our website or a future issue of our *inSight* newsletter. For more information, contact Bryan Welch at bryanw@oaap.org.

Retirement Tips

One of the most common questions lawyers ask when thinking about retirement is, “What will I do with my time? All I know is the law.” While we all have different interests, one thing nearly all of us want is to be engaged in activity that is meaningful. For many, this can include some form of volunteer work. Below are some excellent resources for those wanting information about meaningful volunteer opportunities.

UNITE OREGON

<https://www.uniteoregon.org/>

VOLUNTEER MATCH

<https://www.volunteermatch.org/>

RETIRED AND SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM (RSVP)

<http://www.ocwcog.org/seniors-disability/volunteers-advocacy/rsvp/>

NATIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

<https://nationalservice.gov/>

Lawyer Well-Being Week: May 4-8, 2020

When our professional and organizational cultures support our well-being, we are better able to make good choices that allow us to thrive and be our best for our clients, colleagues, and organizations. Lawyer Well-Being Week, which will occur May 4-8, 2020, is a good next step which lawyers can take together. Below are suggestions from the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, the American Bar Association Law Practice Division and its Attorney Well-Being Committee, and the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Program's (CoLAP) Well-Being Committee for participating in Lawyer Well-Being Week. You can learn more at <https://lawyerwellbeing.net/lawyer-well-being-week/>.



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FINDING MEANINGFUL WORK

The OAAP holds a periodic six-session networking and support group for lawyers making job or career transitions called, “Finding Meaningful Work.” The sessions assist lawyers in creating a personalized job search plan; developing a mission statement and elevator speech; learning and practicing networking skills; and honing job search skills. The group is facilitated by OAAP Attorney Counselor Karen A. Neri, JD, MA-MCFC Candidate. To participate, please contact Karen at 503.226.1057, ext. 11, or at karenn@oaap.org.

CAREER SELF-ASSESSMENT

The OAAP attorney counselors can help you assess your career path and career opportunities. If you would like information about self-assessment, contact OAAP Attorney Counselor Shari R. Pearlman (Gregory), LCSW, JD, at 503.226.1057, ext. 14, or at sharip@oaap.org.

LAWYERS IN TRANSITION PRESENTATION CALENDAR

A “Lawyers in Transition” guest speaker is featured quarterly on Thursdays at noon at the OAAP, 520 SW Yamhill Street, Suite 1050, Portland, Oregon 97204. These presentations are open for anyone to attend. See the calendar below for scheduled speakers.

*APRIL 9, 2020	JULIANA FONG	<i>Private practice and appellate law to CASA Supervisor</i>
	JEFF TAPIA	<i>Immigration law practice to CASA Supervisor</i>

* The April 9, 2020, session of Lawyers in Transition will be held remotely. For remote access, please contact OAAP Attorney Counselor Karen A. Neri, JD, MA-MCFC Candidate, at 503.226.1057, ext. 11, or at karenn@oaap.org.