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# inSIGHT

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## The Heartfelt Importance of Social Connection During the Holiday Season

*By Bryan Welch*

With every holiday season most of us yearn for the warm embrace of family, the laughter of friends, and the joy of togetherness. The holidays bring moments of happiness and an opportunity to create cherished memories, but for many in the legal profession, though, it can also be a time of stress, loneliness, and emotional challenges. These occasions are when the significance of social connection as a resilience skill truly shines.

### Embracing the Loneliness Epidemic

Let's understand the context. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, loneliness is a widespread issue, and for many it is stronger during the holiday season. Despite (or because of) the emphasis on togetherness, a lot of people experience feelings of isolation during this time.

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# The Heartfelt Importance of Social Connection During the Holiday Season

Continued from page 1

Studies have shown that the perception of loneliness can have profound effects on physical and mental health. This subjective experience of loneliness can lead to increased stress, depression, and anxiety, and it's even associated with a higher risk of chronic diseases and a weakened immune system. Fostering social connections thus becomes a vital resilience skill, especially during the holiday season. It's more about good relationships, rather than more relationships. Here are a few tips to keep in mind to cultivate connectedness this time of year:

## Focus on Relationships

Now is a great time to rekindle old relationships and strengthen current ones.

- **Make a list of the people you care about.** Create a list of friends and family members you genuinely want to reconnect with during the holidays—both those you see regularly and those you would like to catch up with if it has been a while.



*(Hint: Now is the time to reach out if you feel a little pang of guilt for not staying in touch!!)*

- **Schedule some quality time, not just time.** Quality time doesn't have to involve big elaborate get-togethers (the holidays are busy enough already). But the time should be meaningful—as simple as a heartfelt phone call where you've set aside some time to be present or scheduling a coffee date where you truly connect. For many, a cup of tea or coffee and a heartfelt chat means more than an impersonal gift.
- **Share your gratitude.** Gratitude helps you feel more connected. Express your appreciation for the people in your life. Let them know why you treasure their presence and what they mean to you. A sincere word of thanks can go a long way in deepening bonds. If you can write a thoughtful card and either read it to them (if you're feeling courageous!) or mail it to them, it's even more powerful.

## Find Ways to Be of Service

This season is full of occasions to be helpful. Volunteering and acts of kindness can offer a deep sense of fulfillment and provide a chance to connect with others who share your values. Being of service gives us the opportunity to refocus our attention outward toward others

rather than inward toward feelings of loneliness, and it increases physical and emotional well-being. Here are a few ideas:

- **Perform random acts of kindness.** These make a difference—they really do, both for the giver and the receiver. Notice and thank the store clerk who needs a smile. Maybe hand out roses to strangers. Studies show that people who perform random acts of kindness often undervalue their effects. So be randomly kind and know that you are helping someone more than you think (including yourself!).
- **Volunteer with causes that touch your heart.** Local charities, shelters, and other organizations can always use extra hands during the holiday season. Whether it's serving meals at a soup kitchen, participating in a toy drive, or helping with a community event, there is a way to contribute that fits for you.
- **Invite your loved ones to join.** I'm a big fan of what I like to call "2-fers" (you know, like 2 for 1 sales). Anytime you can combine two supportive things into one, you double the effect and even save time during a busy season! Encourage your friends and family to join you in volunteering. Doing so not only strengthens your connections but also spreads the spirit of giving, creating a collective sense of warmth and compassion.

## Find Support in Recovery

The OAAP provides three confidential recovery meetings per week for lawyers, judges, and law students who are interested in changing their relationship with alcohol, THC, opiates, stimulants, or other substances. Meetings are available both in person and by teleconference.

**For more information, contact Bryan Welch at 503.226.1057 ext 19, [bryanw@oaap.org](mailto:bryanw@oaap.org), or Doug Querin at 503.226.1057 ext. 12, [douglasq@oaap.org](mailto:douglasq@oaap.org).**



## Create New Traditions

Traditions hold a special place in our hearts during the holiday season, but they can also be a source of stress. To enhance social connection and resilience, consider embracing new traditions and practices that radiate inclusivity and love. Here's how:

- **Open your hearts, doors, and tables.** Extend invitations to friends, neighbors, or co-workers who may not have family nearby or celebrate the same holidays you do. Hosting an inclusive gathering can create a sense of belonging for those who may otherwise feel left out. I remember a time years ago when I had had a challenging year and found myself alone and far away from family for Thanksgiving. A friend I had just met invited me to their family dinner. At first I didn't want to intrude, but I went anyway. It was a slightly awkward, absolutely wonderful day. That gift of being included still resonates with me to this day.

*Continued on page 4*

- **Discover other traditions.** Explore the richness of diverse customs: Learn about the traditions and celebrations of people from all different backgrounds. This curiosity about and openness to other cultures not only broadens your horizons but also allows you to connect with individuals from various walks of life, exchanging stories, food, and love.
- **Develop collaborative traditions.** Involve your loved ones in starting new traditions that everyone can enjoy. Think about having a themed potluck dinner, a game night, or a craft-making session. Collaborative traditions can strengthen bonds, creating memories that are truly from the heart.

– **BRYAN WELCH**  
Attorney Counselor, OAAP



## OTHER WORKS BY BRYAN WELCH AT OAAP.ORG

### Thriving Today

- Savoring a Summer Shower (April 7, 2023)
- Flashing Lights and Guide Lights – Lawyers and ADHD (March 15, 2021)
- Welcome Law Students (August 11, 2020)
- Why Compassion Matters (June 8, 2020)
- Now Might Be a Great Time to Start a Meditation Practice (It’s Easier Than You Think) (April 21, 2020)

### inSight

- Perspectives: Lawyers, Anxiety, and Depression (December 2020)
- Perspectives: Lawyers and Marijuana (March 2020)
- Law Students, Substance Use, and the “Character Fitness” Review (June 2018)

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## Fostering Connection in a Lonely Profession

By Kyra Hazilla

The ABA's National Conference for the Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs (CoLAP) took place in Springfield, Massachusetts this year, on October 3-5. OAAP Attorney Counselors Doug Querin and Kyra Hazilla presented on the new research about social connectedness and the dangers of isolation, especially for lawyers.

The presentation, "Fostering Connection in a Lonely Profession," facilitated a roundtable discussion with an opportunity for collaboration among practitioners hailing from programs across the U.S. and Canada. Doug and Kyra shared materials that attorney assistance programs can utilize, as well as supported brainstorming on best practices for groups, individual sessions, and self-assessment.

The OAAP is honored to offer guidance on how we can all counteract loneliness in the legal profession through intentional efforts at connection. Please reach out if you would like more information or your organization would like us to present this material.

– KYRA HAZILLA  
Director, OAAP



### Mindful Parenting Group Coming in 2024

Beginning in 2024, the OAAP will be forming a group for lawyers who want to learn how to implement mindfulness-based parenting practices in their lives. The group will be offered in hybrid format at the OAAP office in downtown Portland, with a remote attendance option available, and facilitated by OAAP Director Kyra Hazilla, JD, LCSW, and Attorney Counselor Associate Kirsten Blume, JD, MA candidate.

**If you are interested in participating in this group, or for more information, please contact Kirsten Blume, 503.226.1057 ext. 11, 800.321.6227 ext. 11, [kirstenb@oap.org](mailto:kirstenb@oap.org).**



# Meaningful Connections at Work

By Kyra Hazilla

According to researchers Jane Dutton and Monica Worline of the University of Michigan’s Center for Positive Organizations at the Ross School of Business, “high quality connections” are integral to our well-being in the workplace. High-quality connections are those interactions that feel vital, are full of mutual respect and engagement, and provide a sense of unconditional positive regard.

Drs. Dutton and Worline have identified four important elements for bringing more of these kinds of interactions into our professional environments:

## 1. Respectful engagement

They note that this is a condition precedent of high-quality connections. Without communicating respect, there can be no trust. Active listening, warm and engaged body language, and presence (mindful attention) all lead to the kinds of exchanges that build a sense of belonging and positive regard that flows both ways.

## 2. Task enabling

The Drs. use this term to define the way that we help colleagues achieve their goals in the work they are trying to do. Examples of this are when we provide adequate resources and support for the task at hand or we actively remove barriers that impede our colleagues from doing their best work. When we engage in this action, it demonstrates both a willingness to understand someone else’s needs and experience and an interest in helping improve things. This touches on the skill of cognitive empathy, or having an intellectual understanding of someone else’s experiences. This trait can be challenging for lawyers, but we can grow the skill with intention.

### 3. Trusting

Communicating safety (physical and emotional) helps people do their best work. When we feel under threat, we lose access to executive functioning and it becomes impossible to do higher order tasks like lawyering. When we communicate mutual trust, others feel safe with us and recognize that we feel safe with them. Dutton and Worline suggest that giving others control over resources or decisions is one important way to demonstrate trust and vulnerability.

### 4. Playing

We cannot play in environments where we do not experience a sense of safety. Play can be a useful mechanism to allow for engagement as well as connectedness. Creating fun and enjoyable activities as part of our day-to-day workplaces leads to a tenor of good-natured interaction, which has great stress-inoculating effects.

Drs. Dutton and Worline have identified in their research that individual-level compassion

(kindness between colleagues) is one element of compassionate workplaces, and workplace compassion also includes systemic and organizational practices that foster compassion. By expressing compassion, it empowers all of us, no matter our role in the legal community, to bring more heartfelt connections into our interactions with each other. It makes a difference.

– **KYRA HAZILLA**  
Director, OAAP



#### REFERENCE

<https://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/news/jane-dutton-and-monica-worline-share-four-ways-to-create-high-quality-connections-at-work/>

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## Social Connections: An Essential For Well-Being

*By Douglas S. Quentin*

Within the American legal profession, considerable attention is increasingly being devoted to the long-overlooked issue of attorney well-being. In legal circles throughout the country, people are asking critical questions and exploring new and creative ideas to improve the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of lawyers.

Much of this effort was prompted by recent national survey findings of participating lawyers<sup>1</sup> and law students<sup>2</sup>. The survey findings painted a disturbing picture of substantially elevated levels of problematic alcohol use, depression, anxiety, and unhealthy stress. In 2017, the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being<sup>3</sup> was formed to promote nationwide awareness, recognition, and treatment of the mental and behavioral health conditions experienced at shockingly high rates<sup>4</sup> within the legal community.

### The Importance of Social Connection

One vital aspect of well-being that has largely escaped serious notice is that of social connection—the fundamental human need and ability of individuals to interact, communicate, and form relationships with others. Current research is increasingly demonstrating that social connectedness (or lack thereof) is directly linked to physical, mental, and emotional health. As we now know, legal professionals struggle with those very challenges at distressingly high rates.

According to Emma Seppala, Ph.D.<sup>5</sup>, author and national authority on the issue, social connection is a sine qua non of well-being. She notes that current research establishes:



- Lack of healthy social connections is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking, or high blood pressure
- Having healthy social connections correlates with lower rates of anxiety and depression
- Strong social connection predicts greater psychological well-being, better physical health, improved immunity, and increased longevity
- Healthy social connection correlates with better emotional regulation skills and greater levels of self-esteem and empathy for others

This year saw the publication of perhaps the most compelling evidence yet supporting the nexus between social connection and adult well-being. In *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness*, authors Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz describe the findings of the 85-year longitudinal Harvard Study of Adult Development<sup>6</sup>, as well as outcome research from dozens of other national and international studies addressing the importance of human relationships. Their conclusion:

*All of these studies ... bear witness to the importance of human connections. They show that people who are more connected to family, to friends, and to community, are happier and physically healthier than people who are less well connected. (pp.20-21)*

While no known studies addressing this issue in the context of our profession, the “sense of disconnection from others is growing across the world. About one in four Americans report feeling lonely.” Given lawyers’ elevated rates of mental and emotional conditions that are strongly correlated with a lack of healthy connections, our attention and resources must focus on all of these issues holistically.

## The Role of Social Support Networks

Although the precise neurobiology is not fully understood, current medical and scientific research confirms that social support networks act to facilitate physical and mental health and serve as a valuable resource in times of stress or emotional hardship. Strong social support promotes:

- Our sense of self-worth (feeling we are relied on and valued by others)
- Our sense of belonging (knowing we are not alone in the world)
- Our feeling of security (knowing that others are available in times of need)
- Our self-knowledge (having others we trust to provide affirmation and non-judgmental feedback)



Social support is multi-dimensional. It includes friends, family, domestic partners, neighbors, coworkers, colleagues, and acquaintances in our individual familial, social, recreational, and occupational communities. Our connection with others may range from close confidantes to casual contacts. To be healthy, engaged, and effective lawyers, we must learn to create, nurture, and utilize a variety of different relations in our professional and personal lives.

Social support can take several forms, with a single relationship at times serving multiple functions:

- Emotional support. Support gained from relationships with mutual affection, empathy, caring, and shared experiences. Trust, safety, and mutual respect are essential ingredients in an emotionally supportive relationship.
- Logistical support. Support from relationships that provide practical or other day-to-day assistance (for example, rides to doctor appointments or help with other tasks that you are unable to do yourself).

*Continued on page 10*

- Informational support. Support from relationships that offer information, advice, and suggestions.
- Appraisal support. Support from relationships that offer an exchange of reflective information, such as constructive feedback.

## Developing and Nurturing Support Networks

When thinking about developing a social support network, we need to consider our own values, interests, and sources of enjoyment and seek out genuine interactions. Some ways to find and cultivate contacts into mutually beneficial relationships and healthy support networks:

- Get involved. Community activities, places of worship, social service agencies, and professional groups provide valuable opportunities for fellowship.
- Volunteer. Work with others on a cause that is meaningful to you.
- Expand your social network. Accept invitations to social events, especially if they involve new or different people outside your usual circle.

- Draw on your existing network. Call a friend or acquaintance. Relationships are a two-way street. They require attention and nurturing, both giving as well as receiving.
- Get out with your pet. Dog parks and gatherings of pet owners offer frequent and fun occasions to meet others with similar interests.
- Work out. Local fitness centers and exercise classes are often good places to get to know like-minded people;
- Invite someone to lunch. Sharing a meal together can be an enjoyable and non-threatening way to develop rapport with new acquaintances or reconnect with old friends and colleagues.
- Go back to school. A college or community education course can be an opportunity to interact with others in a shared learning environment.
- Be a good listener. Be curious about people and find out what interests them.
- Spend time with family and significant others. Take time to appreciate those closest to you and let them know their importance to you.



# Trans Law Professionals Peer Support Group

This online inclusive group is open to all transgender, trans-questioning, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, and intersex judges, lawyers, law students, and legal professionals.

The group meets virtually on a biweekly basis.

**To request to participate in this group, please set up a meeting with OAAP Director and Attorney Counselor Kyra Hazilla at [kyrah@oaap.org](mailto:kyrah@oaap.org), 503.226.1057 ext. 13.**

## A Couple of Final Reminders

Remember that one of the goals of having a healthy social support network is to decrease, not increase, our stress levels. Honestly evaluate your current and potential relationships to determine whether they feel obligatory, oppressive, codependent, or otherwise harmful to you.

Valuable social connections generally do not just happen. They need to be nurtured. We must periodically reach out and actually connect. Relationships can be difficult and messy. No relationship is perfect. If they are worth preserving, though, they require emotionally investing in their care and cultivation!

**DOUGLAS QUERIN**  
Senior Attorney Counselor, OAAP



## ENDNOTES

1. [https://assets.osbplf.org/documents/in\\_sights/June-2016-In-Sight-with-change-to-proof.pdf](https://assets.osbplf.org/documents/in_sights/June-2016-In-Sight-with-change-to-proof.pdf)
2. [https://assets.osbplf.org/in\\_sights\\_issues/Looking-Forward-Improving-Our-Health-and-Well-Being.pdf](https://assets.osbplf.org/in_sights_issues/Looking-Forward-Improving-Our-Health-and-Well-Being.pdf)
3. <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/ThePathToLawyerWellBeingReportRevFINAL.pdf>
4. <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/ThePathToLawyerWellBeingReportRevFINAL.pdf>
5. <https://www.emmaseppala.com/bio>
6. <https://www.adultdevelopmentstudy.org/>



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## Career Resources from the OAAP

### FINDING MEANINGFUL WORK

The OAAP holds a periodic 6-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. Presently, sessions meet virtually through videoconference. To participate or for more information about the next group, please contact OAAP Attorney Counselor Associate Kirsten Blume, JD, MA Candidate, 503.226.1057 ext 11, kirstenb@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 Counselors Doug Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I, 503.226.1057 ext. 12, douglasq@oaap.org; Kyra Hazilla, JD, LCSW, ext. 13, kyrah@oaap.org; Bryan Welch, JD, CADC I, ext. 19, bryanw@oaap.org; or OAAP Attorney Counselor Associate Kirsten Blume, JD, MA Candidate, 503.226.1057 ext 11, kirstenb@oaap.org.

### OAAP LENDING LIBRARY

Did you know that the OAAP maintains a wide variety of books available for members of the Oregon legal community to borrow? We have titles on diverse topics such as career, stress, anxiety, burnout, relationships, mindfulness, recovery, and retirement that can help you thrive in law and in life. To learn more, call Jeanne Ulrich at 503.226.1057. We invite you to stop by and peruse our shelves!