

Illness to Wellness: Improving Mental Health with Physical Fitness

By Ernest D. Holtzheimer

An unpopular opinion amongst those of us in the legal profession is that even the busiest lawyers can make time for creating a wellness routine. To that point, the most common responses from those who find out Jordan Strokovsky and I recently trained for, and completed, an Ironman (a triathlon made up of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run) while growing our respective legal practices is that the person hearing about our feat “could never do that” or “doesn’t have the time to train for something like that.” The truth is, however, that they could accomplish such a goal (several folks in their late 80s have completed an Ironman), and they could have the requisite time to train, if they so desired. Nevertheless, no one needs to train for or compete in an Ironman or any other race, but we should all take into serious consideration the need to exercise regularly and to increase our overall wellness. The Philadelphia Bar Association is here to help.

It is well understood that balancing a legal practice, family and time for oneself



Ernie Holtzheimer (left) and Jordan Strokovsky at the Ironman Triathlon.

can be challenging, but the bottom line is that to be a good lawyer, one has to be a healthy lawyer. Indeed, attorneys’ mental wellness is required by the rules of professional conduct under our duty of competency. Unfortunately, mental wellness is

not easily achieved in the legal profession due to the occupation’s demanding nature. Stress caused by billable hour requirements, expectations of prompt responses from other attorneys and clients and the need to generate business causes attorneys to become more prone to anxiety, depression, addiction or another detriment to mental health.

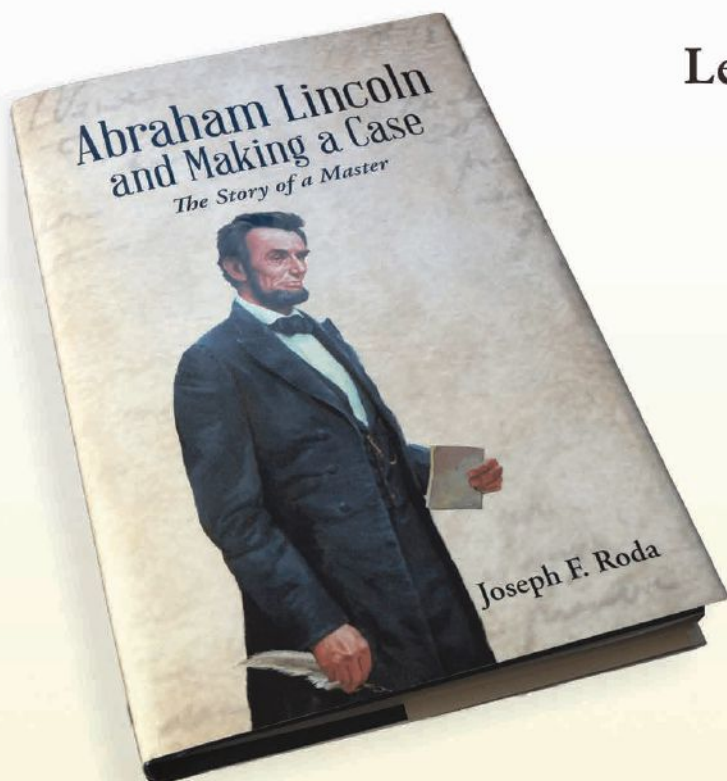
The American Bar Association’s Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs highlighted this in its 2016 study involving nearly 13,000 practicing attorneys. The study found that approximately 28%, 19% and 23% of the attorneys who responded to the survey struggled with mild or serious depression, anxiety or stress, respectively. It may come as no surprise that the study also found that lawyers in the first 10 years of practice and those working in private firms experience the highest rates of depression. Since this study was released, law schools, firms and legal departments have individually made large strides toward increasing awareness of these issues and developing programs to resolve them; nonetheless, we must work together as a community for these statistics

to truly change, and fitness initiatives can help.

The Bar Association offers several initiatives for you to include in your wellness plan: The Young Lawyers Division Running Club invites attorneys of all ages and paces to join together to run and network on a weekly basis from spring through fall; the Bar Association hosts its annual 5K run and walk in May, which benefits the Support Center for Child Advocates; and Bar Association members can join the Wellness and Quality of Life Committee for programming on attorney health and wellness topics throughout the year.

Whether you join one or all of the above initiatives, I hope to see you walking, running or riding through our beautiful city sometime soon.

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