



Stress Got You Down? Personal Assistance to the Rescue!

By Jane Barr Horstman

We strive to proactively anticipate your needs.

Jane Barr Horstman and Associates offers a broad range of services to assist associations in their day-to-day operations and in growing their membership.

Jane Barr Horstman & Associates
1231 Highland Avenue
Fort Washington, PA 19034

215.628.9844

Email: jane@barrhorstman.com

COPYRIGHT 2021. JANE BARR HORSTMAN & ASSOCIATES.





We are in the midst of an escalating mental health crisis, according to the American Psychological Association's 2020 [report](#). The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has generated societal upheaval, economic insecurity, and health concerns, which only add to the litany of social stressors that existed pre-Covid. While stress has increased across various groups, it is especially pronounced in the legal industry. We all know that lawyers face especially demanding schedules and heavy workloads. Add that to an ultra-competitive professional culture and constantly changing legal paradigms, and it is no shock that lawyers experience mental health issues at a rate much higher than other professions.

While stress can be healthy in small doses, constant and intense stress can negatively affect all aspects of one's life. The body responds to stress by releasing hormones that raise blood pressure, cause the heart to pound, make muscles tighten, and prevent concentration. Stress also impairs mood and mental health by manifesting in depression, personality changes, and anxiety disorders. These physical and mental effects can damage one's interpersonal relationships and job performance, perpetuating a harmful feedback cycle. Unfortunately, burnout, "a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" is incredibly [well-documented](#) in the legal industry because of the prevailing response: brushing stress under the rug instead of learning how to manage it.

According to the [ABA Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation](#) study, "levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among attorneys were significant, with 28%, 19%, and 23% experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, respectively." These symptoms are also associated with much higher rates of substance use disorders, particularly alcohol abuse, which often has devastating consequences. It surprised researchers to [find](#) that private sector and high-status lawyers, who also earn better salaries, are more likely to manifest these symptoms. Perhaps this is due to the extreme pressure to perform and retain their positions. So, how can the extreme stress of the legal industry be managed amid such unrelenting and intense pressures?

Much like any problem, the first step to keeping stress under control is acknowledging it exists in the first place. Doing so can be difficult for attorneys who often put their clients and firms first and convince themselves they can simply power through it. However, this initial recognition opens the door to potential solutions for optimal (i.e., healthy) functioning. Specific solutions may differ from attorney-to-attorney but setting goals to better maintain a work-life balance, saying "no" to new tasks when overburdened, and practicing self-care are what mental health experts most often recommend. This can be a daunting task as the practice of law can be so demanding, not to mention the burdens of everyday life that exist outside of the office on top of that.

Here is where outsourcing can come in. Having someone you trust, such as a personal assistant, to take tasks off of your extensive to-do list outside of the office can be a godsend. While they might not alleviate work-specific stressors (there are [other coping mechanisms](#) for that), their assistance with completing household tasks, errands, and financial management can be the linchpin for keeping your life together. By bringing in help, time can be freed up for family, friends, or "me time" once you leave the office. In the 33 years I've run Jane Barr Horstman &



Jane Barr Horstman
& ASSOCIATES, INC.

Associates, I have encountered many high-achieving clients who faced a variety of personally and professional challenges. Personal assistance and administrative management helped reduce their stress by taking seemingly simple and mundane tasks off their plates, allowing them to better thrive in their careers and personal lives. Let me share some examples.

Several years ago, a former government official came to me in a lurch. Because of her position in government, she was unable to handle personal matters while at her office, which caused bills to go unpaid. Although there was plenty of money in the bank, she was not getting mundane tasks done that were necessary in the management of her home. Due to the burdens of her position and her endless to-do list outside of work, she admitted to having a difficult time managing her obligations on either front. So, we did what we do best, we helped make her long and taxing schedule manageable. For over 25 years, we organized her household, including hiring and paying staff, scheduling needed repairs, maintenance and upgrades, helped make phone calls, run errands, and manage correspondence. I could not have been prouder than when this client expressed extreme gratitude for our services for as menial as they seem, personal assistance made her life manageable (and enjoyable!) and reduced her insanely high stress levels that once hindered her job performance.

Another high-profile client came to me under similar circumstances. One night, she and her husband arrived at what they thought was a dinner party, but when they got there, they embarrassingly discovered that the party was scheduled for the next evening. What became abundantly apparent in that moment was that she had no control over her schedule and needed serious help organizing and managing her life. For example, she kept a two foot pile of travel articles, which whenever she had something that she wanted to find, she sat and went through the pile, often giving up because the effort was futile. After nearly breaking down about all of the decluttering and organizational work she needed to do on top of her job, she reached out to us. When she was stressed about an upcoming event, we helped her with party details. A big meeting coming up? We got her notes ready and made sure everything was in order. With the holidays around the corner, she did not have time to decorate, so we did that for her. As personal assistants, our role is to do whatever is necessary to allow the client to do what needs to get done on any given day. By keeping her life manageable, we helped keep her stress levels at bay.

Just like many of my professional clients, personal assistance services can help transform lawyers' day-to-day lives by streamlining an endless to-do list. Having fewer things to stress over and more time to focus on what matters most enables you to achieve more of your personal and professional goals while optimizing well-being, thus allowing a healthier work-life balance. With National Mental Health Day coming up on April 27th, I invite you to look stress in the eye and do something about. You and your loved ones will thank you for it.

Reprinted with permission from the [April 21, 2021](#) issue of *The Legal Intelligencer*. © 2021 ALM Media Properties, LLC. Further duplication without permission is prohibited. All rights reserved.