

A Day in the Life of LCL

By Beth Griffin

y name is Beth Griffin, and I am the director of the Connecticut lawyer assistance program, Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers-CT (LCL). I am also a lawyer and a person in recovery since May 1990. I'd like to welcome you to the world of lawyer assistance.

The above list of concerns and problems presented here at LCL doesn't cover all the issues that we have encountered since the program was launched in 2006. The Connecticut program is described as a broad brush program and that is an apt description.

How do we get started?

Answer the phone. Listen to voicemail messages. Return calls and e-mails as soon as possible. We will make multiple attempts to establish actual contact when returning calls; we are persistent.

What happens next?

You talk and we listen. We all practice active listening and what you have to say is very important. Our world is one of increasing distraction where public discourse across all levels of society often feels like it's lacking in respect. We believe that there may be no more effective way to communicate that we care—no more effective way to positively influence someone—than to give them our complete attention. We ask relevant questions in a respectful, non-judgmental, and non-accusatory fashion. We emphasize confidentiality and privacy and even allow the contact to remain anonymous as facts/circumstances dictate.

And then?

We try to identify and clarify the issues raised and then prioritize those needing immediate response. We listen to your concerns with empathy and respect, explaining all available LCL resources and offering connections, referrals, and ongoing support with whatever challenges are presented. Sometimes that means pushing the envelope, thinking outside of the box, and trying to tailor creative responses to an individual's unique situation. There is no standard checklist or template to evaluate those who seek assistance from LCL.

Who else is involved?

LCL volunteers. They are our fellow practitioners, law school friends, judges, neighbors, bar leadership, and colleagues you might never meet in the course of a long legal career but for the intersection of their dedication to helping the profession and an individual's exigent need for help. They give their time and talents without reservation or cost and believe strongly in the confidentiality of the program. I could not do my job without these incredible people supporting the LCL program.

As the director of LCL, I serve as the portal or gateway to an individual's participation in the program. Initial contact is usually made through me and, like an air traffic controller at a major airport, I'm responsible for some initial assessment of the issue, establishing some basic level of trust and respect with the individual and making preliminary suggestions about what resources might best be brought to the situation. The process is frequently one of starts-and-stops as we try to address an individual's most pressing needs while considering the larger picture of that individual's personal and professional continued well-being, recovery, and health. Some individuals are more willing and/or able to participate in this process than others. The efforts and resources offered by LCL do not differ regardless of the individual's status.

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Sometimes a face-to-face meeting is required. Participants in such a meeting can vary and sometimes more than one in-person meeting is necessary. Meeting venues could be the LCL office, an individual's law office, a judge's chambers, or some other neutral location—whatever circumstances and the comfort level of concerned parties dictates.

Rarely is LCL involvement a one-and-done event. Timing is always a factor and it may take months between an initial contact and any follow-up action with an individual. We do not stalk or harangue, but we will periodically reach out to individuals who have had transient contact with the program for a welfare or status update. Our efforts may not always result in immediate success, but we rarely give up on anyone and are always willing to hit the "reset" button with someone in need. When someone becomes a member of the LCL community, that connection is long-lasting. Relocation, retirement, career change, as well as other life changes may stretch the bond but, in my experience, LCL members' loyalty and commitment to each other and the program run deep.

Do they live happily ever after?

Sadly, not always. Sometimes the human conditions presented at LCL don't result in positive outcomes. The disease of addiction,

whether involving drugs or alcohol, and some intractable mental health conditions can deprive individuals of their legal careers and at times, tragically, their lives. When this happens it produces profound sadness in us and we grieve as a community.

For me, however, the far greater experience is the joy and gratitude that comes from witnessing LCL members reclaim their lives, their dignity, and their self-respect: sharing their successes with each other, whether it be a revitalized career; a family reconciliation; restored physical and mental health; news of new grand-children and the beauty of being part of their lives; rediscovering lost internal markers of self-esteem and personal acceptance; and seeing them make a new commitment to share their experience, strength, and hope with another colleague in need.

Welcome to the world of lawyer assistance in Connecticut. LCL will always have a seat at the table for you if you need or want it.

BETH GRIFFIN

Beth Griffin is the executive director at Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers-CT, a position she has held since February 2006.



Serving the Needs of the Connecticut Legal Community

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers – Connecticut, Inc. ("LCL-CT") is a Connecticut non-profit corporation created to provide assistance to Connecticut lawyers, judges and law students who experience substance use disorders, mental health issues, stress, age-related problems or other distress that impacts the individual's ability to function personally and professionally.

LCL services are available at no cost to all attorneys, judges and law students in the State of Connecticut.

All LCL services are strictly confidential and protected under C.G.S. §51-81d(a), as amended.

Visit our website: www.lclct.org

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