

WEIGHTLIFTING FOR LAWYERS

Book Review by Gerald Cassioppi

Healy, Ph.D., Shawn & Fortrang, Ph.D., Jeffrey, *The Full Weight of the Law: How Legal Professionals Can Recognize and Rebound from Depression*, ABA Publishing, American Bar Association, 2017.

The authors, Drs. Shawn Healy and Jeffrey Fortrang, both have the appropriate and significant credentials, including experience with *Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers*, the Massachusetts Lawyer Assistance Program. In this ambitious work, they endeavor to concisely, yet thoroughly, provide a useful text regarding the causes and symptoms of depression for lawyers, law students and judges, as well as those people who care about them. In addition, they provide a guide as to how to help those same individuals with practical forms of treatment.

The authors clearly detail the facts, data and provide a proper foundation to support the little debated premise that lawyers, in general, have chosen a stressful career. Throughout the book Drs. Healy and Fortrang then support the following concepts and the book's purpose:

Law students and lawyers report having a significantly higher rate of depression than the general population. When left untreated, depression can affect lawyers, clients, families, friends and colleagues. In addition to the effects of mental health conditions on a lawyer's personal life, depression can lead to substantial disciplinary issues that threaten an attorney's ability to practice law. Unfortunately, for many struggling with the burden of depression, it is only when they reach the breaking point, or encounter unavoidable professional consequences, that they reach out for assistance. Many negative consequences could be avoided if the problems that cause depression in a lawyer's life and career are resolved early.

This book is clearly addressed to lawyers for purposes of examination and recovery, and provides an extremely useful approach for creating an awareness and understanding of depression and various related issues. However, knowing they are dealing with lawyers and amateur diagnosis, the authors provide a standard, yet important disclaimer in the book:

The following information is provided for educational purposes and should not be considered adequate to diagnose the cause of any specific person's depression. Consultation with trained mental health and medical professionals is always the best course of action.

Notwithstanding such a critical reference, the book still provides for significant awareness, analysis and a personal understanding for the reader that may be having questions regarding these issues as to oneself or someone they may know.

In summary, the general premise and structure of this book is quite simply for the individual to: 1) recognize depression, 2) accept that it is having an impact, and 3) encourage corrective or rehabilitative action. The most attractive feature of the book is the career specific detail and

examples that are applied to these steps that allows almost any lawyer, young or old, male or female, to relate to.

Some key thoughts and concepts detailed throughout the book include the following:

The general population has a 7 percent rate of depression; medical students have a 13 percent rate when they finish medical school; and lawyers have a 40 percent rate upon finishing law school and 21 percent among all practicing lawyers – based in part on highly competitive environment, minimal feedback, adversarial approach, lack of concrete right answers, isolated work environment, problem solver identity, low emotional intelligence, etc.

While all human beings suffer...potentially depressing influences, lawyers seem to be more reticent to reach out for help.

Mood fluctuations are normal...depression applies to those times when symptoms are persistent and intense.

Lawyers mistakenly attempt to apply their successful lawyering skills in their personal lives, including their family.

The causes of depression can be based on many factors and causal domains, that can include one's physical make-up, including neurotransmitters, hormones, diet, exercise, genetics, etc.

There are many types of mental health conditions, but since they represent a combination of so many ingredients it can be difficult to diagnose.

People suffering from depression are two to four times as likely to develop alcohol dependence and vice versa.

Many types of therapy exist, as well as self-help and support groups. Most states have a Lawyers' Assistance Program and each individual experience is best explored in more detail with a professional.

The book serves its purpose to increase one's own awareness in this area, and it can be useful no matter where one may be in the process. As the authors state, depression is not a cookie cutter experience, and one must find a way to explain his or her own depression and what works for treating it. Fortunately, through educational opportunities offered for CLE purposes, including those provided by the Illinois Lawyers' Assistance Program, lawyers will be provided the opportunity to be made aware of how depression and other illnesses can be recognized and addressed.

Given the heightened awareness in this area, the **Full Weight** by Drs. Healy and Fortang will be a useful tool for many. It is a practical and relatable text that obviously comes from many years of working with lawyers, but more importantly, understanding how they "think."

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