

Mental Health Series – Dealing with professional setbacks

As an attorney, it is inevitable that you will experience a professional setback. Whether it is the loss of a case, termination of a client relationship or a bar complaint, you will likely have to deal with some form of defeat. Learning how to handle these challenges is important to your professional career, as well as your personal well being. As part of our mental health series, this post will discuss professional setbacks and offer assistance for dealing with them in a healthy manner.

No one likes failure. It's a blow to your self esteem that can impede your professional advancement if you let it. When faced with failure in your legal practice, it's important to maintain the right perspective. First, remember that you are not your mistakes. Take responsibility for poor decisions or actions, but don't internalize them as if they make you a bad person. We all fall short of our expectations sometimes. It doesn't minimize who you are as an intelligent and capable individual.

Another aspect of dealing with failure is allowing yourself time to feel the disappointment. You will often hear people tell you to get over it. While getting over it is the ultimate goal, you still need to allow yourself time to experience the disappointment. It's okay to feel bad for a moment. Just don't stay there too long... and one of the best ways to move past the disappointment phase is recognizing the opportunity of the situation. Every failure offers a lesson. Look for it and consider how you can use this experience as fuel different decisions and actions in the future.

So... you lost a case

Try finding an attorney who has never lost a case. It's a hard order to fill. Losing a case is a part of practicing law. Like any other professional disappointment, the most important thing is how you deal with it. Part of what makes the loss of a case so difficult is having to answer to the client.

The legal blog [Tips for Lawyers](#) offers strategies for dealing with this unpleasant experience. A straightforward conversation is the best approach. After taking a deep breath, use your communications skills to give the client an honest assessment of what occurred and provide guidance regarding their future options.

If you are having trouble moving past the outcome of the case, don't hesitate to seek help. Virtually every attorney has been through it at one time or another. Reach out to a colleague you trust. He or she is likely to offer some sound advice and possibly provide a perspective that you may not have considered. If that is not an option, check with your state bar association. Most offer a law office management section or some type of assistance program for members.

Professional setbacks are a part of life. Don't let these challenges affect your mental health and keep you from getting back in the game. Use these strategies to help you through the process, so you can back to practicing law.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a Virginia based writer with a passion for all things legal. As a former domestic relations attorney, she understands the challenge of determining the best fee structure for your practice. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.