

BUSINESS & CAREERS

Shopping, sex latest addictions hitting lawyers



ANNA GRECZMIEL

Shopping and sex. Sounds fun right? These things can be fun in moderation, but for many lawyers what starts out as a way to combat stress goes from relaxing to addiction.

Recently, lawyer assistance programs in Canada and the U.S. have been reporting new trends in addictions affecting lawyers, including more addictions to shopping and sex.

Shopping and sex are both recognized by mental health professionals as activities that can escalate into compulsive behaviours and addictions. The effects of these addictions can be just as devastating as alcoholism or drug addiction, and more awareness is needed in the legal community to help affected individuals seek care and recovery.

Often, by the time lawyers seek help for their problems, they may have suffered a

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number of serious setbacks and damages in their professional and personal lives. It is for this reason that lawyers' assistance programs in a number of provinces are digging deeper and looking for new ways to reach out to lawyers earlier to let them know that help is available at all stages of their struggles. Prevention is the key to helping lawyers stay healthy and develop positive rather than negative coping skills.

A huge aspect of prevention is undoubtedly *discussion and knowledge*. When personal issues are discussed more openly and

accurately, individuals are more likely to evaluate their own lives. Also, people are less likely to pass judgement on themselves or others for their experiences or feelings. Normalizing the discussion of addictions and mental health will help immensely in prevention as well as recovery. Even with all the research that has been done and all the articles that have been published, misinformation and stereotypes unfortunately remain present when it comes to talking about addictions.

Try discussing sex addictions in a room

full of people and you will likely hear many different reactions; some may laugh, others may roll their eyes and some may suggest a common misperception that a sex addiction is simply an excuse for cheating. These reactions can be very difficult and shaming for individuals who have experienced a sex addiction. A sex addiction is when an individual's healthy need for intimacy becomes a compulsion, and therefore it is often up to the individual to identify and seek help for their behaviour when it becomes problematic.

Sex addiction is much like many other addictions, in that the part of the brain affected by addiction (the midbrain) equates the addictive substance or process with survival. Sex and romantic relationships relieve stress and anxiety, as well as create feelings of pleasure and excitement. When an addiction is present, the midbrain works to shut down or mute the frontal cortex of the brain, which produces reason, judgement and morality. This results in compulsive and sometimes dangerous behaviour in an addict to fulfill its "survival" needs, or in the case of sex

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Give associates clear advice, path

Partnership

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associates who aren't ultimately destined for law firm partnership continue to work hard and are attracted to your group, as they will believe the firm has their longer term best interests in mind throughout their time at the firm.

Be honest

Finally, perhaps the most important advice is to be honest. Good associates understand there is a period of their career where they are still honing their craft and developing their skills as a lawyer, and appreciate there is a period of paying their dues within the firm. What tends to cause the greatest amount of frustration is not

understanding their path, or more commonly, not understanding the criteria by which their path is being evaluated.

Helping associates understand these issues in an honest, forthright manner will not only give you the greatest chance of success in keeping your best talent motivated and at your firm, it will also create opportunities to attract those from firms where such steps aren't being taken. ■

Warren Smith is a managing director with The Counsel Network, a lawyer recruitment and career consulting firm. He is also the only Canadian elected to the Board of Directors for the National Association of Legal Search Consultants (NALSC), North America's leading legal recruitment industry association.



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BUSINESS & CAREERS

What starts as a stress release can lead to addiction

Addiction

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addicts, to obtain sexual pleasure.

The effects of a sexual addiction on personal relationships, family life and an individual's own well-being can be truly devastating. The stigma associated with a sex addiction is a real barrier in seeking help, which is why it is important to share facts and not pass judgement when discussed.

Another newer addiction that has been known to raise a few eyebrows is a shopping addiction. Again, this behaviour is seen as normal, fun and often luxurious. The old phrase "retail therapy" is a sign, however, that shopping can be used to relieve stress and escape

problems. Like a sex addiction, shopping becomes problematic when it is a compulsive need rather than a fun activity, and other aspects of an individual's life are brushed aside to fulfill this need. Shopping addictions can easily lead to financial, family and personal problems. Other problematic behaviour such as hoarding may accompany a shopping addiction as well.

Compulsive sex and shopping are just two examples of behaviours that lawyers may use to cope with stress. If an individual is equipped with other positive coping skills, these behaviours may not present a problem whatsoever. It is when the stress on an individual is great (and we all know law-

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The old phrase "retail therapy" is a sign, however, that shopping can be used to relieve stress and escape problems. Like a sex addiction, shopping becomes problematic when it is a compulsive need

yers have their fair share of stress) and her/his ability to cope with stress is weak that problems may arise, and these seemingly innocent behaviours can turn into compulsions. Lawyers who feel they may be developing compulsive behaviours are encouraged to seek help early, by getting in touch with their provincial lawyer assist-

ance program or talking to another professional. There are many ways to get help, including participating in a peer support program offered by the Alberta Lawyers' Assistance Society and other lawyer assistance programs in Canada.

Keeping a constant check on your stress levels and ensuring that you have positive coping skills

is necessary for lawyers to stay happy and healthy. We can't make stress and other personal problems go away, but together we can help individuals affected by addictions and mental health issues by keeping an open mind, staying informed—and most importantly—staying in tune with one's own physical and mental health, and ensuring you are coping with stress in a positive way. ■

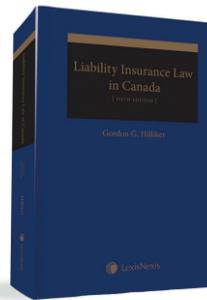
Anna Greczmiel is currently a law student at the University of Calgary and is working as a summer student with the Alberta Lawyers' Assistance Society, a charity that provides confidential help to lawyers, law students and their families.

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Thoroughly prepare for a job interview

Interviews

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substantiated and, more importantly, if they're not delivered."

If projections are requested, base them on your experience and support them with facts, said Bongard. "You want to be realistic and not pie in the sky."

For older lawyers who have not been in the job market for a while, it is advisable to do a quick refresher. "Consider having some practice trial runs with trusted colleagues or family members," said

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It would be a good idea to review the firm's press room to find out the latest news and background on the company.

Ohnjec. "This will help in not being caught off guard during the actual interview, and most importantly, be prepared. Preparation and confidence are surely major components to the success they've had in their careers, and they should see being successful in an interview as requiring those same key elements."

"Senior lawyers should also consider that although in most occasions the interviewer will be another senior lawyer, it is possible that someone more junior than the candidate may be sitting in on or even conducting the first interview," he added. "Be prepared for that possibility and don't be put off or offended if that happens."

Younger lawyers need to do their homework as well. "Make sure you can describe how your

skills and experience match the requirements of the open position," said Ohnjec.

"The hiring manager will more than likely ask you a host of standard questions such as 'Why do you want to work for this firm?' and 'What makes you right for this role?' Practice your responses to these queries with a friend at home so you can provide clear and concise answers."

Appearance is also important. "It's always better to come overdressed," said Bongard. "There is no reason to cut corners."

Being well-suited sends an important message about the time and effort you put into the interview. "Even if you're interviewing with a company that has a more casual dress code, it's always better to be slightly overdressed than underdressed," said Ohnjec.

It's equally important to avoid the common pitfalls. These include not listening and interrupting. "Being very respectful is critical," said Bongard.

Tactfulness runs to not ranting and raving, Ohnjec pointed out. "Criticizing former employers only makes you look bad. Even a mildly sarcastic quip can raise red flags, so when in doubt, take the high road."

Under-preparation is another no-no. "Do your research," said Bongard. "Don't ask the obvious questions that could be answered on a firm's website. The more insightful the question, the more impressive."

"Candidates should always visit a company's website before contacting them," said Ohnjec. "It would be a good idea to review the firm's press room to find out the latest news and background on the company, and search the Internet for articles written about the business."

This way it's not only the country's job prospects that are rosier, yours are as well. ■

Don't bring a bird, or sister, to the interview

In the race to stand out from the crowd, job-seekers have gone overboard. Some have lost the opportunity for employment, and left interviewers scratching their heads. Here are some of the weirdest and wackiest interview blunders according to Robert Half, the world's largest specialized staffing firm, which frequently conducts surveys of hiring managers and workers.

- "A job applicant came in for an interview with a cockatoo on his shoulder."
- "The candidate sent his sister to interview in his place."
- "One candidate sang all of her responses to interview questions."
- "When asked by the hiring manager if he had any questions for him, the candidate replied by telling a knock-knock joke."
- "One candidate handcuffed himself to the desk during the interview."
- "When asked by the hiring manager why she was leaving her current job, the applicant said, 'My manager is a jerk. All managers are jerks.'"
- "I interviewed someone who had a jawbreaker in her mouth during the entire interview."
- "One individual said we had nice benefits, which was good because he was going to need to take a lot of leave in the next year."
- "The applicant told me he really was not interested in the position, but he liked that we allowed for a lot of time off."

To help applicants put their best foot forward, Robert Half recently launched a website, www.roberthalf.com/dont-let-this-happen-to-you, with light-hearted videos depicting interviews that have gone awry along with tips for avoiding common blunders.

