

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.

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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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