

INTERVIEWS

Association of Legal Administrators Leaders Discuss the Importance of Mental Health Initiatives

August 8, 2025



Q&A

Association of Legal Administrators Leaders Discuss the Importance of Mental Health Initiatives



Travis Armstrong

President, Association of Legal Administrators
COO, English, Lucas, Priest & Owsley, LLP



Eryn Carter

Executive Director, Association of Legal Administrators

Travis Armstrong is President of the Association of Legal Administrators and a 20-year ALA member. He serves as Chief Operating Officer at English, Lucas, Priest & Owsley, LLP in Bowling

Eryn Carter is the Executive Director of the Association of Legal Administrators, where she helps empower legal management professionals to drive innovation and excellence in their law firms and other legal organizations by sharing expertise and developing solutions.

In this interview, Travis Armstrong and Eryn Carter of the [Association of Legal Administrators](#) (ALA) talk about why mental health initiatives are so critical to the legal industry and discuss resources like the ALA's Mental Health First Aid training program.

What are some of the challenges affecting mental health among legal professionals, and why do these often go overlooked in legal culture?

Travis Armstrong: I think the challenges that contribute to many of these [mental health issues](#) in the legal profession are driven by client demands. It's part of the profession. It's a high-stakes game in many cases. So, I believe you see these issues arise frequently.

There are also some generational factors at play. Certainly, baby boomers and Gen X are probably less likely to ask for help or admit they're overwhelmed by the stresses created by deadlines from courts, clients, and meeting client expectations. As our workforce shifts more toward Millennials and Gen Z, I believe these generations are more comfortable talking about mental health. They're more willing to say, "Hey, I've got a problem and I need some help." Still, I think the main reason we see so many mental health issues is due to client demands and legal professionals feeling like they're facing it alone.

Eryn Carter: I would add that there probably isn't enough emphasis on the importance of paying attention to mental health and [well-being](#), especially as attorneys are being educated. If it's discussed at all, it's likely just a small part of their overall education. Once they start working, it can create a ripple effect. The pressures of the job, responsibilities, and high stakes involved tend to spread throughout the law firm or legal organization. Everyone in that environment is managing these things, but it's important to consider how much attention is given to mental health and whether that focus makes a meaningful difference.

Would you say putting mental health on the back burner has been traditionally a part of law firm culture?

Travis Armstrong: I think that's absolutely right. There's an old saying that clients don't hire law firms; they hire lawyers. So, if you're handling a critical matter for a client and feeling that pressure, there's this underlying sense that you can't just take a break or step back and take care of things yourself. Because the client didn't hire your firm, they hired you individually. And that permeates the [law firm culture](#).

Eryn Carter: It's also reinforced in popular culture, too. TV and movies romanticize this image of law firm culture. So, if you're in a position where you might be struggling, you wonder, who do you talk to when you need a break or want to focus on yourself? How much room is there for that kind of sensitivity and grace? I think the culture really impacts this.

ALA now offers Mental Health First Aid training to legal professionals. How is this training designed to help, and how has it been received by members so far?

Eryn Carter: The mental health first aid training offers very practical, hands-on education and helps our members become more open, aware, and knowledgeable about how to respond and what resources they can access. We collaborate with instructors who have the expertise and credentials to teach the course and provide the knowledge. I believe this partnership has been very successful, and there's strong synergy between those delivering the course and our member audience. We continue to seek ways to promote awareness of the course's availability, along with opportunities for recertification. It is an ongoing effort, not a one-time event, and we encourage our members to stay informed about current developments in that area.

Generally, it's not the attorneys who are going to be doing that or leading the charge; it's often delegated to legal administrators. Many of our members are HR professionals. The mental health first aid courses give them an advantage, since they are often the ones responsible for identifying, recognizing, and responding to mental health issues within their firms. Anyone in the legal management field or similar roles can benefit from this course. The response from our members has been very positive.

Travis Armstrong: The main takeaway from the course is that you don't have to fully understand how to treat the illness. It's more about knowing what resources are available, how to talk to someone who might be dealing with the situation, and most importantly, how to listen to them. It's also about knowing what resources they can access, how to refer them, and how to encourage them. A large part of that course focuses on encouraging the individual to make some lifestyle changes, like improving eating habits,

exercising, or communicating effectively, finding someone they can confide in and talk to, and also encouraging them to seek professional help if needed.

What are some specific steps law firm leaders can take to create psychologically safe environments and support colleagues dealing with trauma or substance use issues?

Travis Armstrong: Creating a culture where people know it's okay to speak up. We often discuss workloads in our firm through practice group meetings, talking about assignments and deadlines. This dialogue helps identify who might be feeling unnecessary stress. Ultimately, it mainly comes down to building a culture where people feel comfortable discussing issues, knowing they won't face stigma or judgment like in the past. This starts with leadership from the top and cultivating a positive culture.

Eryn Carter: As we mentioned earlier, the image of the legal field often portrays it as intense and work-focused, where you have to work relentlessly until the job is done. But what's the alternative? I think addressing mental health issues early in someone's career can help reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges. Additionally, firms might consider restructuring their business models—like revisiting roles and responsibilities or providing new technological support—to help employees perform better. This can both elevate their work and reduce pressure by offering tools that make tasks easier.

There are various ways to address mental health concerns, but the key is to identify them early, foster open conversations, and see this as an ongoing dialogue within the firm environment. It's important to invite participation not just from HR or managing partners, but from others too, creating a safe

space for honest discussions and potential solutions that the firm can explore and implement.

Your collaboration with the Tennessee Supreme Court led to expanding access to the Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program services. What impact has this initiative had, and do you see potential for similar partnerships in other states?

Travis Armstrong: It's an ongoing process. Although it hasn't been expanded yet, we've had discussions with the Tennessee Supreme Court and lobbyists to expand that coverage to anyone who works in a law firm, a court setting, or a legal department. We haven't reached the finish line yet, but there is now a recognition and awareness that wasn't there two or three years ago, at least in Tennessee.

We surveyed our member firms a few times and discussed the stress levels they experience daily. We also asked whether they feel comfortable talking about mental health issues or challenges they might face within their firm, or if they'd prefer to speak with someone outside their organization. Most people felt more comfortable talking to someone external, which highlights that you can't just walk down the hall and talk to your HR professional. Some individuals simply don't feel comfortable doing that, largely because of the stigma. Tennessee has at least recognized and acknowledged this issue.

The main obstacle now is funding, finding the resources to expand these services to everyone working in a legal environment. Our goal is to increase awareness, and hopefully, soon, the legislature will find a way to fund this expanded resource.

Eryn Carter: I think one of the things we hope to see is a more proactive approach to mental health before a tragic event occurs. The Middle Tennessee Chapter is a great example of how an unfortunate incident, like losing someone close to them, can be turned into something positive. It shows how that experience can help others prevent something similar, such as the suicide of a loved one. I believe that the more lawyer associations partner with organizations like ALA, which share this concern, the better. Together, we can all benefit from these efforts.

With ALA's growing mental wellness community and national efforts, what's next in your strategy to make mental health a sustained priority across the legal industry, not just a one-time initiative?

Travis Armstrong: I think in Middle Tennessee, we'll continue working with the legislature and the state supreme court to get more advocacy at that level. Hopefully, we can get this over the finish line and help it become a model for other states to copy. I believe it just takes a few to lead the way, and then we'll see other states and legal professionals demand that they follow suit and do similar things in their jurisdictions.

Eryn Carter: As we support and follow the Middle Tennessee Chapter's journey, especially their advocacy with the Supreme Court in Tennessee, we can see how this could grow into something larger. Maybe other ALA chapters or organizations can use this as a model to expand and turn it into a movement. We truly appreciate Middle Tennessee for taking on that leadership role and inspiring others and our members to do the same.

Furthermore, as we continue, ALA hopes to keep mental health as a regular part of our conversations. We plan to offer more educational opportunities

for both members and non-members who see ALA as a trustworthy resource for learning about this topic. We aim to bring in experts and showcase our members' experiences. The more we discuss this at conferences, roundtable sessions, and at the chapter level, the more support we can build locally. With over 82 ALA chapters, they can all contribute to raising awareness and providing valuable insights for those seeking greater understanding and education on mental health.

I think one of the things that we as an organization need to explore is whether there are other organizations we can partner with that are focusing on mental health as part of their strategic initiatives. The American Bar Association (ABA) certainly does, and there are other legal professional associations like ours that have also been part of the conversation. So, I believe exploring partnerships with these organizations can help us amplify our efforts as an industry or profession.

Strength lies in numbers, and the more we leverage these relationships and build synergies through partnerships, the better.