

BB Eileen Travis

[00:00:00] **Intro/Outro Voiceover:** Welcome to Building Belonging. A podcast of the New York City Bar Association and its Office for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. In this episode: Is the Legal Profession Making Good on Its Mental Health Promises? Today, we're joined by Eileen Travis, Executive Director of the City Bar Lawyer Assistance Program.

Eileen has 30 years experience in mental health services and has been part of the spearhead of the legal profession's growing awareness of, and respect for mental health and wellbeing. She gave us a wide angle view on how far the industry has come, and how far it has still to go.

[00:00:36] **Eileen Travis:** The wellbeing stuff is wonderful and it keeps coming and we keep doing it, but the underlying issue is really a culture shift.

[00:00:43] **Intro/Outro Voiceover:** Eileen also shared what she has learned on the ground working with practitioners throughout the profession.

[00:00:47] **Eileen Travis:** This feeling with certainly with a lot of associates that they're on their own, that they don't get proper mentoring that there is not enough collaboration. Of course, the big issue is buy in from leadership.

[00:01:03] **Intro/Outro Voiceover:** But there's a hopeful outlook for those looking at the next generation of mental health in the legal profession.

[00:01:08] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** Gen Zers, if you are listening, keep it up. You have a lot of power here. Be really selective. And also, firms it's really easy for you to stand out amongst your peers by doing the right thing.

[00:01:20] **Intro/Outro Voiceover:** Opinions expressed are those of the speakers and not necessarily of the City Bar. Here's your host, Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci.

[00:01:28] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** Welcome back to Building Belonging today we are joined by Eileen Travis, who is the Executive Director of the lawyer assistance program here at the New York city bar, and also the founding director of this program here at the New York City Bar. We are so happy to have you here, Eileen. You were one of the first people I really connected with at the City Bar and I felt like we had this synergy and thinking about well being and belonging and what it means to really be aligned on those issues to move

the needle forward in the industry. So we're really excited to hear from you. I'm Tanya Martinez Gallinucci, the Executive Director of the office. I'm going to hand it over.

[00:02:07] **Angie Avila-Lanciotti:** I am Angie Avila Lanciotti and I am the Manager of Communications and Development with the office and I'm going to throw it over to my good friend.

[00:02:15] **Mary Ellen La Rosa:** And I'm Mary Ellen LaRosa, and I am the Senior Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator for ODEIB I'm going to pass it over to our guest today, Eileen, if you could just tell us a little bit about what belonging means to you, and give us a little bit of your background.

[00:02:28] **Eileen Travis:** Absolutely. This was really sort of a challenging thing for me to think about just using the term "belonging." But it really took me back. I am a child of the 60s. I grew up in the 60s. And this is very reminiscent of that time when we were really searching, everybody was searching for their authentic self and our own identity and who we were.

And it's as relevant today as it was all those years ago when I was in my formative years, growing up the idea of being accepted by your group, by your friends, by your family. It's certainly broadened to when I think about communities, I think about the larger world community being accepted by the larger world community.

And making a contribution to that very important for me being accepted by all the other communities I belong to, the community of family, my neighbors, my religious community, extended on and on to, my friends, my support system. My work community is so important to be accepted by, accepted, trusted, loved for who I am, all of me, so body, mind and spirit, how I look, how I feel, to just be accepted for all of that and not have to think about, the parts of me that are not perfect. I was talking to a law student about this yesterday about how unrealistic it is to strive for perfectionism, which we never, it's just not within the human world to be perfect.

We're not supposed to be and having issues is really how we learn to be better. We're always learning to be better, not learning to be perfect. So belonging to me is sort of the underlying reason why I'm here. Why we're all here is really to, think about where we fit in the world and to be supported, loved and trusted for who we are and what we do.

And this I think gave me the idea when I was very young that I wanted to be in a profession where I was helping people. I didn't know that was social work. When I was very young, I didn't know what it was going to be. I thought of many different things.

But social work kind of fell into place for me. And that's, that's also a community that I belong to.

[00:04:54] **Angie Avila-Lanciotti:** Thank you so much, Eileen. Every time we speak, I always leave feeling so good. We've actually been working together for quite some time, for five years, you and I, so my first question to you is, can you tell us and our listeners about LAP at the City Bar? What types of services does it provide and who's eligible to receive them?

[00:05:16] **Eileen Travis:** Okay. First of all, I have to say Lawyers Assistance is all around the world, Lawyers Assistance exist in every state, since the 1970s. I think the first program was established in the 1970s. It started as a very grassroots movement with lawyers helping other lawyers at that time in the 70s who were struggling with alcoholism, got sober and then started a community of helping their fellow attorneys who were struggling with alcohol and then other substances.

They were large groups and eventually they went to their local bar associations and they formed committees. The lawyers assistance committee at the bar was here long before I started. I think they started in the 80s. I started in the 90s. And then the bar associations because we recognized that lawyers, law students and their family members were struggling with many other things than just substance use.

The Bar Association started to hire professionals like myself to expand the services that we were able to offer. And at this point and the wonderful thing about the City Bar is that it gives us tremendous latitude so that we can help any kind of legal professional and anybody related to a legal professional even if it's a distant cousin. And we can also work with lawyers or law students who are from other areas of the country or the world who happen to be in New York at that time.

We can also reach out to them. I'm very grateful for that because there are some states where you have to be barred in that state, you have to be admitted in that state to use their Lawyers Assistance program. That's not true of our program. So our services extend to law students starting in law school, law students, lawyers, judges, paralegals, staff, we work with staff of the Bar Association,

with, we work with staff of the courts, staff of law schools colleagues very often we'll get a call from an attorney that said, I have an old law school buddy who I just spoke to recently, who's going through something, what can I do for them?

So it's really anyone related to the legal profession that might be struggling with any kind of problem that we can help to find resources for. Of course, the majority of individuals that call us are either struggling with a mental health issue, a substance use issue, it could be a personal issue, it could be a relationship issue, marital, or with their partner or a professional issue.

It could be, a law student struggling in law school maybe with attention deficit disorder, or just struggling with the workload. Or struggling with anxiety. It could be a lawyer who is struggling with where they're at in their law career, maybe they're unhappy with the area of law they're practicing in and they want help to think about where else they can move, or maybe they're moving towards retirement.

And they want to have one help in thinking about what the next stage is in their life. So any particular problem that they're having that really is affecting their well being. And that, as social workers we can help find resources. We are resource people. So we have some direct services that we offer.

We do offer, we don't do therapy, but we offer supportive counseling. It's very different. So sometimes we speak to an individual who's not quite ready to take the next step and we will work with them for a while to help them get there. We do short term counseling for that, or they have a unique kind of problem that they just need that individual support in addition to other support that they may have. We offer a really unique service called peer support. So that grassroots organization still exists. So I work with the committee here at the bar and also many volunteer attorneys who themselves have struggled with either a mental health or substance use problem who volunteer their time to give back to the profession because people were there to help them when they needed it.

So if I speak to say a lawyer who's struggling and I asked them, would you like to speak to another lawyer who's had a similar problem? And they say, yes, once I connect those two people, whatever they discuss is completely confidential. So the two things I really should mention are if this is a free program. We do not charge for any of the services that we offer and it's completely confidential. We know how important confidentiality is to law students and lawyers and judges. So we have the same level of confidentiality as lawyer client privilege, which is actually protected under a judiciary law. So our

only goal really is to help. So when an individual calls us whether it's about a problem they're having or about somebody they're concerned about the first thing I say when I answer the phone is "how can I help you?"

And we talk about the problem they're having. We start to identify some solutions. We set up a plan of different ways. We can help them. We have great resources in the community including many clinicians who themselves were practicing attorneys before they became clinical social workers, psychologists. We even have a J. D. M. D. We have a practicing attorney who is now a psychiatrist. And the great thing about going to a clinician like that, for an attorney or a law student or a judge is that they really understand the stresses of the profession. And then they also have the clinical expertise to take a deeper dive into what's going on with that particular individual.

[00:11:07] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** Thank you so much for that background. And every time you know, I've heard this so many times, and every time I hear it, it just fills my heart with hope. Because I do think that self care, well being, especially being attuned to our mental health and our needs is so critical to the success of lawyers, young and old, all lawyers, all people, forget about lawyers, regardless of what your profession is.

[00:11:32] **Eileen Travis:** Absolutely

[00:11:33] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** And I've been very open about my own journey with mental health and how coaching and therapy have helped me and I will always tell those stories because I do think it's important for folks to hear people who they might see themselves in talk about those struggles. And I'm just so thankful that we have you and that you do this work. And so I was hoping that you can give us a little bit more of a background or summary of how you've seen the landscape change. You said you've been doing this at the bar since the nineties. We're now in 2023. O M G. And I know that we've spoke, we've spoken about this in the past. There's been some really big milestones, like the Patrick Krill report, for instance, and just trends that we're seeing across the board.

So if you can talk to us a little bit about what you've seen change in the industry in the last 20, 30 or so years.

[00:12:23] **Eileen Travis:** Okay that Krill report which is often called which was actually co sponsored by the ABA and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. That report was done in 2016 and the reason for it the reason for

the study actually was to measure the incidence of substance use and mental health problems in the profession.

We really have not had a study done in many years. But mental health and substance use, the incidence was really why Lawyers Assistance Programs were established in the first place. So the statistics that came out of that study in 2016 were not surprised. Most of the statistics were not surprising.

They were all in line with what we already knew. 21 percent anxiety, 23 percent stress depression was very big. Chronic stress was very big. The kind of stress that stays with you. You wake up within the morning, it stays with you all day long. You go to sleep at night, you wake up in the next morning and it's still there.

But there was one statistic that was really very concerning and that was that one third of the 13, 000 lawyers that participated in the study turned out to be young attorneys in their first to 10th year of practice and they were most affected by either a mental health or substance use problem, or in some cases, both.

It's very common for individuals that are struggling with anxiety, depression, stress, to self medicate with marijuana, with alcohol. And then if you have that psychological and biological predisposition to develop a problem. Now you have two problems. You have the mental health problem that's never really been addressed, just self medicated.

And now you have a dependency and that's called co occurring disorders. And about 65 percent or so of individuals have that co occurring disorder. Very often, an individual with a substance use issue, once they get into recovery for a couple of years, will then discover they struggle, also struggle with anxiety, depression, or another mental health problem.

When that statistic came in, the ABA and all of us were very concerned that because it was such a tremendous change in trend that so many young lawyers were coming into the profession or acknowledging in the profession that they were struggling with these issues and basically said, we've got to do something and if we don't do something now, what is the future going to look like?

So the ABA started a well being task force really propelled this chapter of well being that we're still you know, that's still growing in the profession at that particular time. And I think the basic issue in this report that came out of that well being task force is that all areas of the legal profession, we all have to work together to make a healthier profession and to have healthier lawyers, healthier

law students. And the bottom line of course is, well, the wellbeing stuff is wonderful and it keeps coming and we keep doing it, but the underlying issue is really a culture shift. Because for example, a lot of the large law firms across the country have hired wellbeing professionals.

There's well being happening in law schools. There's well being happening at bar associations. There's well being happy happening at non profits at all areas. But if you're working at a large law firm and this particular firm has hired a well being professional and they have wonderful they have meditation three times a week. They have yoga twice a week. They have groups that meet. They do all kinds of wonderful things but you're an associate working 12 to 15 hours a day you're going to have a lot of trouble accessing those wonderful services that are being offered. So there's still this gap in having the services, which is really wonderful in their ability to raise awareness. Before this happened in 2016, we rarely went to law firms.

We were rarely invited into a law firm to do a presentation. Suddenly the floodgates opened and we were like in so many of the large law firms. And that is a result of something else that came out of the study, which is called the pledge. And that is part of the ABA as well. So the pledge is a seven step document that actually, that law firm or a bar association or a law school can sign on to agreeing to number one raise awareness bring in education, open the discussion and talk about the fact that these things do exist and there is help available. To really cut down on the appearance of alcohol or the use of alcohol at events. Especially, events at large law firms, events at bar associations either have alcohol free events, or if you're going to have alcohol, have alternatives.

If you're going to have a signature cocktail, have a signature mocktail. So that, that was another thing. To have easier access for individuals and support employees that may need to take time off to address and mental health or substance abuse problem. And if they need accommodations when they come back to work to offer accommodations, either a shorter work week or time off to attend outpatient treatment, things like that.

So it's been very successful, I think. Currently, worldwide, there are 210 signatories, many of the large law firms in, that are based in New York and across the country have signed on to the pledge. And, it's really wonderful because they're really paying attention to the importance all of all of this and, well being, stresses, self care, I think they're synonymous. I don't think you can be in a state of well being unless you're taking care of yourself. So self care is really a very important part of this whole movement.

[00:18:18] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** Thank you for sharing all of that. There's so many gems you've just given us. I don't even know where to begin, but you know, I was a first year associate in big law in 2016 when the report dropped. And I remember all the hype around it. I mean, I myself got to see Patrick Krill talk about the report in person because he was doing the rounds around the firms.

And so it was like, Oh, it's lunch and he's here. I might as well hear from the horse's mouth. Right. And there's so many things that you've touched on. I a hundred percent agree. There's a huge gap. There's a huge gap in between what we're saying needs to happen and the access to those things. Cause you're right.

All of these big firms, they're, they have, they've hired staff, there are meditations available, you even get money to buy your, services, or I got a gym, I have a home gym. Thank you, big law, appreciate you. So like, it's there, but there is a huge gap in who can access it and why and when, and a lot of that has to do with culture.

[00:19:23] **Eileen Travis:** Yes.

[00:19:24] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** A lot of that has to do with bias. a Lot of that has to do with, oh my gosh, this is my least favorite term when we talk about this, but this is what they use, the business model, using air quotes, because I have a lot of strong feelings about the business model. I don't know if you've seen that semi viral slide that has been circulating recently about the unspoken rules of big law. I don't know if you've seen it, but. And I want to say it, I say it's semi viral because I think the folks who have circulated it have a certain amount of safety in being able to circulate it and talk about it out loud and even what was shared was a screenshot from someone's phone.

Right? Someone was like, Oh, wow, someone's at the quiet parts out loud, and we need to capture this. But some of the rules I can tell you off the top of my head was you're available 24 seven, no no excuses, no explanations. If you had any part of a document . And something wrong happens, it's your fault. I don't care how little or how much you had. Everything has to be perfect. You are in the service industry and you need to serve your clients, your partners and associates. And they, what they say is right and nothing you say can contradict that. I mean, I'm speaking in very broad strokes and I'm not quoting verbatim. But those were like, pretty, pretty close to verbatim. And when we talk about leadership and when we talk about creating inclusive cultures, these unspoken rules are exactly contradictory.

And we have a really hard time getting people to buy in. I can't even tell you so many partners or folks who we meet will look at me like, can you believe these people? They don't want to work 24/7. What is up with this generation? It's no, what is up with you? We all deserve to live And one of the things that was really surprising to me coming into Big Law, I was a teacher. And I would say teaching is also a really high stress job, right?

And there's trauma, even vicarious trauma, just being a teacher. I've had, I had kids who became pregnant. I had kids who were involved in gang violence. I had a kid once whose father lit his mother on fire, and then came to school the next day. It is really traumatic. And I will tell you, my mental health suffered more as a lawyer in corporate America than it did in the Bronx, in New York City, in a public school. And I couldn't believe how many people I saw, and most of them were my peers and friends and people I knew and cared about, were taking mental health leaves. Mental health leaves because they were literally on the brink. And I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that we have a culture crisis in the industry. We have a culture crisis and I was wondering if you had any thoughts about how we can bridge that gap.

[00:22:26] **Eileen Travis:** Well, I certainly agree with you. And that unfortunately is one of the things that has not changed in the profession is the stress level, starting in law school. There still is this expectation of perfectionism, of course, which again, is an ideal, does not really exist.

This level of responsibility. This feeling with certainly with a lot of associates that they're on their own, that they don't get proper mentoring that there is not enough collaboration. Of course, the big issue is buy in from leadership. That is the big issue. And I remember when we started to make the rounds of the large law firms, and I actually did several presentations with Patrick Krill. There was only one law firm. When the head of the firm introduced us, he came in and the way he introduced us was to talk about himself and about something that happened in his life. It was some somebody very close to him who had a very serious illness and having to cope with that illness. And the trauma of having to cope with that.

And the fact that we all have emotions and we all have feelings and in law school, you're supposed to, you learn to put those things aside because they only interfere with your ability to be a lawyer. They don't see them as contributions. So the fact that he opened up and spoke about himself, it was so inspiring.

And that is a big problem for many especially the wellbeing people in the large firms is yes, they put the leaders, put their stamp of approval on. Yes. Okay.

We'll hire wellbeing. We'll offer all of these wonderful, wellbeing tools for our staff. But if they're not present so that the lawyers who are that are working for them can see that they really do support it, if they're not part of the conversation, then it's you know, it can be extremely frustrating.

So that I think is one of the most important things especially for firms is that the leadership is present in the conversation that they take part in the conversation and they really buy into this being really important. So that the lawyers, whether you're a lawyer, you're an associate, you're a partner, or staff, understands that this is real, that they really understand how important this is.

And they really do believe that this is a that this is a really important part of practice. I mean, I think we are so fortunate at the Bar Association to have Bret as our leader because we know that he really buys into everything that we do he buys into this idea of us collaborating with each other to really be the best that we can possibly be. And he is present for all of this. So I think if the law firms or non profits or law schools, whoever the institution happens to be if they see that their leaders are really buying into the importance of self care and the importance of wellbeing.

I think it'll be a lot more successful than it is now.

[00:25:30] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** Thank you so much for that, Eileen, and I 100 percent agree. I think leadership has to be on board. And just another point or another few things I think also matter, accountability.

Right. If we're seeing trends that folks are needing mental health leaves consistently, that should be a huge red flag for leadership for the firm.

Like something's broken, you need to fix it. The culture of your environment of your work environment. Most people spend one third of their lives at work. Lawyers, especially big law lawyers probably spend a lot more because of the hours that you mentioned. If people need to take mental health leave, that is not self care, that's emergency. That is emergency actions to take to deal with someone who's in crisis, right? I think the idea of self care has also really been kind of, I don't want to say perverted, but we have really skewed views about what self care means. Self care is not a luxury. Self care is not a gift you give yourself when you've done a lot of work.

You need to engage in self care every day to make sure that you are healthy and viable and able to think well. The neuroscience behind this is so important, right? People need to exercise for your brain to work well, not just for weight

loss, right? Not just for maintaining your body. You need... a certain level of functioning in your brain to be able to think critically and consciously. And I love the point you made about some of the biases in the industry, like feelings are bad. You can't have, you can't think objectively if you have feelings when really feelings are another asset and are a great way to understand your moral compass and whether you feel a line and whether something feels right or wrong and it'll allow you to kind of kick the wheels on some of the issues. You can have feelings and be objective. You can have feelings and make amazing legal arguments in the other direction.

And so pretending that they aren't there actually stifles people and doesn't allow them to feel like they belong. And it's assets that we're not tapping into that we absolutely can be tapping into.

So this is all very helpful. And I'm going to kick it over to Mary Ellen, who has the next question for you.

[00:27:55] **Mary Ellen La Rosa:** This narrative that we've been discussing might be shifting a little with Gen Z now entering the workforce. Could you talk a little bit about kind of how maybe you've seen that shift in terms of like mental health days self care, taking precedence and things like that.

[00:28:09] **Eileen Travis:** Well, this is a very interesting group and I think a very challenging group especially for the legal profession because they're bringing different values. Self care is definitely something they value tremendously. Flexibility is something they value. They really do believe in work life balance and that it's important and that it's not just a concept.

It's as you said, Tonya, it's a necessity. It's something that we all should be practicing on a daily basis and integrating into our life, not just when it's an emergency, but it's something that it really should be should really be part of it. I think they're much more collaborative, mainly because they've grown up on computers and they're involved in a lot of on site groups.

And they like interacting with people. That's one part of it. On the other part, I think especially with Covid, they have really felt this isolation, this idea of isolation, which is against their belief that we really should be much more collaborative and much more in touch with each other. But they have been isolated and I think that's, that's taken a toll.

I certainly don't have to tell you they are the most diverse generation that we have and they definitely value diversity. It's really part of who they are their

belief system their experience in growing up. So I think they definitely bring a tremendous challenge especially to legal employers who may see their ideas as well.

They're coddled. They're spoiled. They're a spoiled generation because they want time off Or they you know, they believe in time off they believe in self care. We survived without that. They should be able to survive without that. But it's not going to stop. I mean, this is really the beginning this tide is really turning so I think it's you know we really have to take a look at it and we really have to take a look at what they're saying and really listening to what they're saying and try to support them as best as possible. Because the other thing the profession is interested in is retention, you know is training, is the value that they bring, is the investment that they put into training them, and they want value back for that. And if they're not going to compromise in some ways, they're not going to be open to listening to what they have to say and what they need. They're not going to get their needs met either. So there has to be a meeting of the minds in terms of what gen z is saying in terms of what's important for them and for the future.

Mm

[00:30:50] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** And you know what you said, we've heard over and over again. We hear it from the recruiters, we hear it from the law schools, we hear it from the firms, they're like, we have folks who won't even interview. They're like, I want nothing of it, I know what you're selling, I have no interest, and I get it. Honestly, Eileen, I... I... feel like if I knew then what I knew now, maybe I would have made the same choice.

And don't get me wrong I'm really grateful for all the experiences I got and where it brought me, I was able to climb out of generational poverty because I worked in big law for a significant amount of time in my life. But that was a sacrifice, right?

And not everyone's willing to sacrifice their health, their well being. And it really did. I was at a place where I didn't recognize myself anymore.

I Was working crazy hours. I couldn't see my kids. I couldn't see my family. I couldn't plan vacation. I couldn't, I wasn't happy, and now when I think about since I started this role, my evenings at five o'clock, you know what I do?

I play with my kids and we play for hours and I feel so happy and so fulfilled.

And I'm not even kidding, without working out, without dieting, nothing. Just a month into switching roles, I lost 10 pounds.

[00:32:09] **Eileen Travis:** Wow.

[00:32:10] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** 10. Within one month. That's a lot for a little person. I'm a tiny person.

[00:32:15] **Eileen Travis:** Yes.

[00:32:16] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** But in that first month in June last year, after just one month, I lost 10 pounds.

And that just goes to show you how deep and intricate that mind body connection is. Because I hadn't changed anything else. I didn't change my diet. I wasn't exercising more. It wasn't anything like that. But I, that, my cortisol levels obviously dropped significantly, right? There's just so much there, and I don't think that a way forward isn't possible.

I think that there is a way forward possible, and I think if people are saying, Hey! No single person should be available 24/ 7 all the time for corporate America emergencies. We need to listen. Ever heard of shifts? You can create 24 /7 client service without dumping on single people to, to strain themselves and literally take years off their lives. We should not be allowed to do that.

We should not be allowed to create cultures where we're taking years off of people's lives for any price tag. I don't care how much you get paid.

That is, it goes against some of the principles of law, actually, about allowing people to do self harm. It really does.

So it's one of those things that I think our industry really needs to come to terms with. We need to take a real good look in that mirror. And think about who we want to be and what kind of culture, what kind of legacy we want to leave.

[00:33:42] **Eileen Travis:** Yeah. So the shift you're talking about obviously is to put on the front end while we now have on the back end. So on the back end, we have this wonderful well being movement. We have all these well being professionals. We have all these events. We have all this focus on well being. Which all should be on the front end.

All of these things that we're talking about, the the idea of self care, the idea of not being available 24 /7, the idea of the billable hour, not being almighty God. And that is what, is supposed to be pushing you. If you're working in a large firm, all of those things.

We need to move it from the back end to the front end, going in. So that it's going to be again, a much healthier profession and have much healthier professionals and much healthier professionals are going to really be much more successful with the clients that come to you. So there are tremendous benefit in looking at the way we're doing things.

I mean, thank God we're doing them. But now we really have to shift them in a different way. So when a Gen Z person who is graduating law school is looking at work and looking maybe at working for a big firm and seeing what this big firm has to offer, it's going to be much more enticing to them. If they know they're going to have flexibility, if they know they can put their self care first, if they know that these are really the ideals of this particular firm that they're looking at or the workplace that they're looking at.

[00:35:13] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** That's absolutely right. And Gen Zers, if you are listening, keep it up. You are the target audience. You have a lot of power here. Be really selective. And also, firms it's really easy for you to stand out amongst your peers by doing the right thing. If you actually put these things into practice, you will be high on that list.

[00:35:33] **Eileen Travis:** I actually read, and I can't remember where it was because it was a while ago, but I actually read there was one firm who was actually awarding a certain amount of billable hours for their employees who could prove that they were practicing self care.

[00:35:55] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** OMG,

[00:35:55] **Eileen Travis:** that, is that amazing? I mean,

[00:35:57] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** that's amazing.

[00:35:58] **Eileen Travis:** I don't know who thought about that, but I think that is really so wonderful.

[00:36:02] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** I love that. I love that. I would love to hear if anyone knows about this, please contact us. We want to hear more about this.

I'm gonna hand it over to Angie because we have one last question for you. Even though this was way too quick, Eileen, we're gonna have to figure out something else because this is not enough for me. But go ahead, Angie.

[00:36:20] **Angie Avila-Lanciotti:** Thank you, Eileen. And I mean, as always, you always bring up such good points. But before I get into my question, I mean, whenever I hear the argument well, I wasn't coddled and neither should these younger generations. I mean, imagine if we felt that way about indoor plumbing. Would still be using outhouses. And for, we'd be using outhouses. And for what reason?

[00:36:44] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** my god, Angie, thank you. Thank you for that.

[00:36:47] **Angie Avila-Lanciotti:** plumbing.

[00:36:48] **Eileen Travis:** yeah,

[00:36:48] **Mary Ellen La Rosa:** in with a quote that I've seen circulating the internet about when typewriters came into fashion. And everyone thought that you would never write again. And they were concerned that you would lose the art of handwriting because there were typewriters now. And I think that's so funny.

And before that, it was not being able to etch your words into stone. Why would you do that if you had ink? Don't be afraid of evolution and progress.

[00:37:15] **Eileen Travis:** absolutely.

[00:37:16] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** All right, I'm gonna pump it up one more notch since you guys are all giving me these great analogies. This one is a little, this one's a little sticky, but I have definitely even said this to people, to their face. When I hear, but it's just the business model, that's what the business model is. If you don't want to sign on to the business model, then don't, apply for these jobs.

It's the business model. That is the exact same thing people said about slavery. So just think about that.

What does your support of certain business models mean about your values? What does it mean about what side of history you're on? Because when you really think about that, if you're really trying to pull all the details and

everything that we're flushing out and make it as simple as something as silly as a business model, we know where you stand. So just food for thought.

[00:38:06] **Eileen Travis:** That's pretty powerful.

[00:38:10] **Angie Avila-Lanciotti:** Speaking of culture shifts aspiring lawyers have to go through a character and fitness interview before they can be admitted to the bar. This process is used by a state bar association, evaluates an individual's fitness to practice law.

But as we have mentioned, culture shifting. And some, you might say many, argue that these questions that are asked during these interviews can be intrusive. So why are these questions being asked and how is the process changing if it's changing?

[00:38:41] **Eileen Travis:** The process is definitely changing and this is one thing that I can say. Being part of this. I am an extremely proud of because we work very hard to have the most intrusive question removed from the bar application several years ago. And that question had it was so intrusive because it asked prospective bar members about their mental health and substance use background, if they've ever been treated, how they were treated when they were treated. They actually had to submit records if they were inpatient. They had to submit records. Now we work with the character and fitness committees, especially in the first and second department and with the attorney grievance committees. But in the character and fitness committees, they very often will refer them to Lawyer's Assistance Program for an evaluation.

So if a bar applicant has had a history of issues, so they could be related to a substance use problem, it could be arrest for possession, it could be arrest for... driving while impaired. It could be mental health issue. It could be assault. It could be a number of different things. If they see a pattern and they're concerned with it, they refer them to us for an evaluation because they want to make sure that at this point in time, at the time that they're applying, that they are fit to practice, that they've addressed those issues and they are now fit to practice. Now, nobody has a crystal ball about the future. So nobody's saying, okay Well, are they going to be okay in 15 to 20 years? We can't say that but we can say yes, this individual has addressed those issues. Or in some cases no, they really haven't and they need time to in which case we will work with them.

We work with many bar applicants. We can start actually working with them while they're in law school while they're in law students if they're one else and they know that they're going to have problems at character and fitness, we'll

start working with them while they're still law students. So by the time they get to character and fitness they have documented the work that they have done to address their issues.

So just to get back to what it was like when that question was on the bar application. I would get reams and reams of records for individuals who had been in, say, mental health treatment, inpatient mental health treatment. Something that would first come to the committee, so I say to myself, okay, these committee members, these committee staff are all lawyers.

How are they interpreting these records? Who's reading these records? And then they send them to me. I should never see them. And then the other important thing was that all of these documents were becoming part of this individual's permanent record. So if they were to leave New York and say wanted to get admitted in California, that whole entire record would get transferred to any other state or country they wanted to be admitted in. So it would follow them everywhere. So we are one of only believe it or not.

Maybe a dozen States that have had that question removed. There are many states that have still have these very intrusive questions that they ask about a person's mental health background or substance use background or arrest records. Yes, they have to. They definitely have to show if they've been arrested for any reason.

But as far as the mental health part and the substance use part we got that question removed. So we're really very happy about the fact that we were one of maybe a dozen or so states that have been successful in having that removed.

[00:42:34] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** That's amazing. And wow. Just wow. I mean, you, no one can see us, but I was just, my mouth was open listening to what folks had to do because it's, I mean, the hypocrisy, right? Like I should actually, I should have gotten a questionnaire from the legal industry to find out how likely it was that you were going to give me mental health issues.

Let's be real here. What was this whole conversation on?

Like, how dare you? Wow. The goal.

[00:43:00] **Eileen Travis:** I just want to say that we are so fortunate to have two attorneys that have been, they've both been committee chairs they're both still involved with our committee, who have helped so many applicants get admitted who've worked with them pro bono to have to get applicants admitted and also

to get attorney help attorneys who've been suspended and in some cases disbarred get reinstated.

So we also, yes, so we also work with attorneys who've been suspended and disbarred. But as far as Admission, we do our best to help. We get many students that call us, especially after we've done a presentation on preparing for the admission process. We get many calls from students who ask us questions, who are so concerned that they've had one speeding ticket, they won't be admitted.

And, we're able to certainly, help them understand that's not going to prevent them from being admitted. But for the ones who've had serious issues we can support them.

[00:44:07] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** Well, thank you.

[00:44:07] **Eileen Travis:** become admitted.

[00:44:09] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** Thank you so much for all the work you do. Thank you for being here with us. I feel like this can't be the one time. I feel like there's so many more things we want to hear about. Thank you so much for being here. It's been such a pleasure having this conversation with you today.

Thank

[00:44:20] **Eileen Travis:** you so much for inviting me. And if you want to have me back, I would love to come and talk to you about many other things.

[00:44:27] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** The people want it. We want it. We're gonna, we're definitely gonna do it. So stay tuned, folks. Thanks again, Eileen.

[00:44:32] **Eileen Travis:** Thank you so much, everyone.

[00:44:33] **Angie Avila-Lanciotti:** Thank you for listening to our conversation with Eileen Travis, Executive Director of the Legal Assistance Program at the City Bar. And welcome back to DEIB for the People. We're here to curate a selection of literature, media, and discussions that cast a spotlight on all things DEIB for your feed. It's about embracing diverse voices, stories, and perspectives to foster an inclusive community. Mary Ellen, start us off.

[00:45:09] **Mary Ellen La Rosa:** Thanks Angie. So what I have for you today is less of a resource and more of a practice. And so I want to talk about using and consuming social media intentionally. Doing this protects your mental health, it further safeguards you from misinformation and disinformation, and it minimizes burnout.

I know, for me, I hear a lot about social media detoxes, and since I've started practicing a more intentional consumption of my social media, I haven't felt the need to detox from anything. So I have a couple tips to get you started, first one being seek out accounts that align with your values and provide actionable steps. My second tip would be to engage thoughtfully. So seek out and engage in discussions that grow your community, but also challenge you to grow as well. And tied in with that thoughtful engagement is more than just the headlines. Headlines are meant to kind of give you a snapshot and draw you in. I like to think of it as respecting the author enough to take in their words, rather than just assuming that you already know. And finally, if nothing else, interact and engage with the media that you want amplified. So sharing, liking, commenting all informs the algorithm that not only do you want to see more of this content, but it pushes out the content to more people as well. I'll throw it to Tanya.

[00:46:31] **Tanya Martinez-Gallinucci:** So my content this time around is a little bit different and weird. It's actually a short video called The Egg. And apparently, this video, the story behind it, is from a short story with the same title. But the version that I've seen, it's actually thanks to my son, who watches and consumes lots of science based videos on YouTube.

And there's this one org, and I might butcher this name, so please forgive me, it's called Kurzgesagt. And they make these amazing short videos on a bunch of different topics. A lot of them are science based, which is how we got into them. My son was watching all their like deep ocean and dinosaur videos. But then they also do videos on like mental health, wellbeing, and they even have some self referential videos on their organization and how they do what they do.

Because they really research a topic very well and get a lot of data and research and put together this really beautiful story. Now, the one that I'm referencing today, The Egg, I believe they put out in 2019 and it's not a science video or mental health video necessarily, but I think it is very much DEIB. And in the short story, without ruining it for folks, because I do think people should give it a listen and a watch. It's only seven minutes long. And so we'll put the link in the show notes. But the long and the short of it is this idea that our universe is

basically like an egg. And that our experience as human beings is just one piece of our overall experience because this universe was made for us, humanity.

And so it's this idea that we are, at least a piece of us, is in every single person and in every single life form that has ever existed and will ever exist. And the whole goal of this experiment of life is to evolve and to be better humans. And only when we have experienced all of life experiences will we mature enough to go into the next level of our existence of our being.

And in the short story that I'm reading here, I got, I saw it on Wikipedia that explains it, they say you, you evolve to a God like being or something like that. I don't even think you have to go there. It's more about understanding the human experience and being elevated to that. But I couldn't think of a better message and video to recommend right now. There's a line in the video that's really sticks out to me. The way it starts out, it's like a 48 year old man dies suddenly. That's how the video starts. And then he's in the afterlife and he's talking to this being who's explaining why he's there.

And as he's learning about his human existence and all his human existences that he's been every type of person and all this stuff he comes to the realization wait, I was Hitler. And the deity is like, yeah, and you were also every single person he did harm to. And it's just that idea that we're all capable of the full range of humanity and the full range of experiences, I think is an important one to reflect on.

But I remember after seeing that video and hearing it, I thought, wow, I think people could learn so much from thinking about all the ways. We experienced life on earth. And so I put it out there because I think we need messages like this. And I highly recommend just checking out their other content.

They have amazing stuff on mental health and wellbeing, their video on, loneliness, I thought was so well done and really gives practical tips to people on what you can do in terms of your mental health and being just to make your life more fulfilled and happier. So that's my recommendation.

Angie, what do you got?

[00:50:27] **Angie Avila-Lanciotti:** Thanks, Tanya. My DEIB for your feed is, surprise surprise, a miniseries called When They See Us. When They See Us is a Netflix drama series that tells a true story of the Central Park Five, now known as the Exonerated Five, a group of five black and Latino teenagers who

were wrongfully convicted of the brutal assault of a white female jogger in Central Park in 1989.

The series follows the lives of these young men, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana, Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam, and Korey Wise, from the time of their arrest, through their trial, imprisonment, and eventually their exoneration. It explores the systemic racism, injustice, and police coercion that led to their wrongful convictions.

So this mini series came out in 2019, so why am I talking about it now in 2023? This past November 7th, Yusef Salaam just became the representative for the Central Park District and is now serving on the City Council. This win comes after more than two decades after the DNA evidence overturned his conviction where he served seven years in prison.

It's really important and if you haven't watched it yet, if you haven't educated yourself on this story, I highly recommend you go back and watch it and see where all of these Exonerated 5 are now what it did to their lives and listen to their stories. It's really important and it's a moving piece it's a hard watch, but it's needed.

That's my DEIB for the day. All right, so that wraps us up for today. Thank you, Tanya and Mary Ellen. So let's hear from you. Have you come across a book that reach shaped your worldview, a movie that stirred impactful conversations or a documentary that unveiled new realities? Share it with us. Please send all submissions to BuildingBelonging@nycbar.org. We would love to hear from you. We have great content, but we also want to hear content that you've come across. So please send us your submissions. Together, let's make waves and propel positive change. Until next time, keep building belonging in every space.

[00:52:55] **Intro/Outro Voiceover:** Thank you for listening to this episode of the New York City Bar Association podcast. Opinions expressed are those of the speakers and not necessarily of the City Bar.

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This podcast was produced and edited by Eli Cohen.