

STUCK IN THE LEGAL JUNGLEGYM?

BY KARMEN MASSON

Do you feel stuck in your current job? Uncertain about your "fit" in the profession? Are you concerned your job is going to change or end? Wherever you are in your career, and whatever obstacles are in your legal jungle gym, support for these and many more issues, is available to all Alberta lawyers, law students, and their families.

Whether by choice or imposition, facing a job or career change can be like an adult trying to swing across the monkey bars with alligators nipping at your heels – a worrisome, lonesome and stressful time. Self-doubt (*I don't have the right skills*), catastrophizing (*I could lose everything*), fear of criticism (*they will think I'm a failure*) and judgment (*I should have worked harder*) are some of the internal voices that can leave one feeling immobilized and unable to reach out for that next bar. At any stage of one's career, internal and external barriers, both real and perceived, can make us feel fearful of uncertainty, which can cause anxiety. While a certain amount of fear is natural, when it stops you from living the life you want to live, you need to pay attention to it.

The good news is that no matter whether you are just starting your career or are deep into it, you are capable of change and you can manage change. There is support to help you deal with worry, relieve stress and renew your energy through Assist.

Assist's programs are offered on a confidential basis and are free of charge to Alberta law students, lawyers, and their families. Through professional counselling services, you can work with a psychologist who will help explore what your fears are really about and how you can work through them. Access to this Assist service is available 24/7 by calling 1-877-498-6898. Assist's Peer Support line is also available by calling 1-877-737-5508.

Seeking support of others, especially of those who have been through the same thing can be reassuring and encouraging. Conversations with Assist Peer Support volunteers are confidential and they will listen without judgment and support you in exploring what is most important to you.

Questions you may consider discussing with a trusted partner such as a Peer Support volunteer include:

- What are the pros and cons of staying where you are versus trying something different?
- What are the risks of making a change, or staying where you are?
- What do you value most in your professional life?
- What makes a work day meaningful for you?
- How can you learn more about other options?
- If there were no obstacles, what type of work would you choose?
- How can this challenge be viewed as an opportunity?
- Who can you have a "coffee chat" with to discuss their experience or transition? *[Note: My own experience has been that most people in the legal profession are glad to share their experiences as they too have had "helping guides" throughout their career.]*

In addition to support from others, caring for yourself and exercising self-compassion is integral to building resilience so when you are faced with challenges and are feeling pushed back by stress, you can tap into your reserves, bounce back and tackle those monkey bars! Self-care can take many forms, such as scheduling regular holidays or breaks for recovery and renewal, or having a wellness routine that incorporates physical, mental and spiritual components. AssistFit activities are a great way to get started and become part of a supportive community. Check out upcoming events at <http://albertalawyersassist.ca/news-events/>.

If you would like to join the community of Peer Support volunteers across the province you can start by filling out an application at <http://albertalawyersassist.ca/volunteer-application-form/> or for more information call the Assist office at 403-537-5508 or 1-877-737-5508. **Upcoming Peer Support training sessions will take place in Edmonton on April 28th and in Calgary on May 5th.** Further training in coaching skills for Peer Support volunteers is also scheduled for June 2nd in Calgary.

While the journey along your career path may feel like you are stuck dangling on the monkey bars and soon to lose your grip, you have the support of empathetic and compassionate colleagues and other helping professionals who will stand with you and help shine a light on the path towards your success, however you define it. How can we assist you, wherever you are in your unique legal jungle gym? 🙋

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KARMEN MASSON has spent the past 20 years in private and government practice as well as in executive leadership roles. Now a certified professional coach, she helps lawyers and other professionals achieve their personal and professional success. She has been an Assist Peer Support volunteer since 2014.

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