

## Interview- Angus Lyon

1. Could you give us a bit on your background please?

*After working for about 25 years as a civil litigation solicitor (mainly claimant personal injury work) I signed up for an introductory counselling course. I had been specialising increasingly in psychiatric injury work at the time and wanted to understand more about psychology. The more I studied, the more hooked I became. After more study (far more fun than my law exams in the dim past) I obtained a secondary qualification as a psychodynamic counsellor and have since worked in law and psychotherapy.*

*As well as the law practice, I am a director of Catalyst Counselling, a social enterprise, which provides therapy training and counselling in Suffolk and Norfolk.*

*And I play cricket and bass. Not at the same time.*

2. You're publishing your book *A Lawyer's Guide to Wellbeing and Managing Stress* with the ARK Group. What made you write the book?

*A few years ago I became a volunteer for LawCare and earlier this year I was talking to some of their people about my ideas for a book combining the overlap in my two professions. Long story short is that after I covered the introductory session on the management stream at SJ Live in London in February I talked to Ark about my ideas and the project took off from there.*

*From my time with LawCare I thought that there must be ways of helping lawyers to be more aware of issues surrounding their wellbeing at an earlier stage of their careers. I know from personal experience that if I work with a counselling client for a few weeks or a few years, things change. Clients are able to experience and see things differently in a therapeutic relationship. Things become clearer in retrospect.*

*I wondered what I might be able to share from the therapy/law overlap. What if we could be more aware of what's happening in and around us when the heat is on? What if we could reverse the therapy and be aware of the psychology before tipping into rehab? It's about prevention as well as cure.*

3. What are the key topics discussed in the book?

*The high level of mental illness among lawyers is a 'wicked problem', a complex multifactorial social problem compounded by lawyer culture. The book looks at the problem in this light and introduces ideas from a number of social and design thinkers whose insights could help the profession.*

*The concept of 'prehab' helps us to reverse the therapy, build resilience and prepare better for the demands of legal life. Prehab (prehabilitation, as opposed to rehabilitation) is a concept familiar to elite athletes in preparing for competition.*

*The self-help parts of the book use the framework of 'ME.YOU.DO' as a memorable way of integrating various aspects of life to help us to be more aware of what is happening when we are under pressure.*

4. How can a lawyer prepare for the inevitable stress that comes with the job?

*That's pretty much summed up in ME.YOU.DO I guess.*

*ME is about being mindful of what is happening inside (intra-personally), say neurologically, in bodily sensations, emotions and thoughts. YOU is about being 'mind-minded' in two person and group relationships (inter-personal). And DO is about the more non-personal aspects of life: what has happened to us in the past and what we can do to change things now for the future.*

*ME.YOU.DO is informed by current thinking about 'mentalizing'. We mentalize when we try to make sense of our own or others' thinking from the clues we see and hear. Mentalization is a developing evidence-based psychological theory which integrates a number of therapeutic approaches and is showing increasingly good clinical outcomes in work with patients who are suffering from conditions ranging from moderate anxiety and depression to personality disorder.*

5. Why do you think stress has becoming accepted in the legal industry compared to other professions?

*Other professions have their demands (think of the army, medicine, teaching, etc.). We are not unique in being pressured. But there are pressures that are unique to the legal profession.*

*Maybe part of the problem is tied in with the question. I consider law as a 'profession', not an 'industry'. Industry implies an emphasis on profit for investors, not service to clients as officers of the court. If this emphasis is the strongest driver for the culture of a firm, fee earners will be driven to max hours, overwork, compete not collaborate, and aim for monetary reward above all else. Of course we need to make money, but it's a matter of where we put the emphasis.*

*Law will be high stress profession. It must be. It's the nature of the job. It's how we cope with the pressure that counts.*

6. Throughout your 35 years as a lawyer, do you think the job has become more or less stressful?

*More stressful, no doubt. I would be surprised if any experienced lawyer anywhere said otherwise.*

7. In your own career as a solicitor, what key aspect did you find the most stressful and how did you learn to manage this?

*Probably trial advocacy, I would say. It wasn't good for my blood pressure. And I was pretty rubbish at cross-examining! I just gave it up – I haven't worn a gown and tabs for years.*

8. In the book you discuss mindfulness – what exactly is the concept and how can this help with stressful situations?

*A simple answer is that it is 'awareness in the present moment'. We slow down and just observe ourselves, whether it's for a few moments or a half hour meditation. It helps us to be aware of what's happening in our body, feelings and thoughts. It can help to ground us. It's simple; it's not brain surgery but it can help calm the brain.*

9. What, in your opinion, are the most negative affects stress can have on a person? Have you seen any extreme examples?

*'Stress' as such is not the problem. 'Stress' gets a bad press. Excessive psychological pressure, whether sudden or sustained, can lead to stroke, heart attack, addictions, burnout, high anxiety, depression, relationship breakdown, unemployment, suicide. And, yes, sadly I have seen many examples.*

10. What do you think is the biggest benefit people will gain from *A Lawyer's Guide to Wellbeing and Managing Stress*?

*Getting a bit of help, really, on different levels.*

*I hope some of the insights help individual lawyers to be happier, lawyer groups (like firms, chambers, regulators, judiciary, law colleges and others) to think about wellbeing more proactively and openly, and the different branches of the profession to collaborate more in tackling issues around mental health. And that the ME.YOU.DO principles are helpful to non-lawyer readers too.*

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