

### Orientation or other timing for the "Hidden Sources of Law School Stress" booklet?

In thinking about effective timing for introducing the ideas in these booklets, there are some good reasons not to prefer 1L orientation. True, it is an appealing time since students are already together and receiving handouts, and if orientation is the only time possible for distribution, then so be it. However, the convenience also points up one of the major problems. Students at this time are typically inundated with an array of administrative and practical handouts, new ideas, and new experiences. All of this creates an unlikely environment for the sort of thoughtful, reflective reading required for assimilation of major life lessons such as those that the booklets offer.

There is a second timing issue with orientation, of equal concern. Assuming students do sort the booklet out from the other orientation handouts and give it a more thoughtful read (I do believe the cover design and unique appearance may help with that), most students are not likely to be receptive to the messages at this juncture. We would expect, and my research with Dr. Sheldon also indicates, that students are experiencing elevated emotions, confidence, and a good bit of excitement as they arrive to begin law school. They are starting a new adventure, and their previous school experiences have generally been very positive. So, if they do read the booklet at the very beginning of law school, many (or most) are likely to feel that the material does not apply to them. Most will not yet relate to the level of pressure and stress that law school often presents, nor the discouragement of competing with so many other bright students, because their own life experience has been so different.

For these reasons, if you do decide to distribute at orientation, it will enhance the positive effect of the booklets substantially if you later revisit the information & its underlying messages when students are having the experiences described. This might be done through meetings or email reminders at key times during law school - perhaps a few weeks into the first semester, before exams, when the major critiques of writing assignments begin, and/or after grades come out.

Ultimately, there are unavoidable tensions among the competing goals of convenience, relevance and prevention. The earlier one reads the booklet the less relevant it may seem but the more preventive it might be. Orientation may well continue to be a popular time for distribution, given the logistical convenience. Other windows during which preventive potential is high and relevance is probably sufficient include from 3-6 weeks into the first semester, and early in the second semester of first year, when the experience of the demands of law school has become quite real for most students. People report good success using the booklets at these or other strategically chosen times.

Many people have also used the booklets with good effect in the second or third years. While these windows obviously can not help prevent distress in the first year, 2L's and 3L's will have maximum

comprehension of the ideas from personal experience, and the discussion of values, motivation and success is timely for looming career decisions as well.

For another approach, one dean recently mailed the booklets to his incoming 1L's early in the summer, so that they could read it well before they arrived. He reports much good feedback from the students. This timing certainly allows for careful reading, virtually guarantees very high interest, and avoids the many distractions of orientation and the actual transition to law school. Whether the relevance issue is a real problem at this point remains to be seen, and I hope to have more feedback from this dean.

#### **Thoughts about the "Career Choices" booklet**

I have been encouraging more people to consider using the job/career booklet later in the first year or in the later years, to supplement and extend the effect of the stress booklet. It seems that every student that I counsel on jobs and career tracks needs guidance in thinking about how to choose appropriate work. In particular, students do not know how to prioritize the competing goals and desires that different jobs may address, nor what will actually make them feel satisfied in their work and lives. And we know that the profession is dealing with low satisfaction and high incidence of depression, burnout, attrition, and substance abuse.

The second booklet provides a refresher on the original principles from the "law school stress" booklet (healthy values, motivation, and needs), and a concrete method for applying them to this critical life decision. It also explains burnout in some detail, and how the same basic principles apply to prevent burnout during and after law school. Ultimately, use of this booklet may have even more positive impact than the "stress" booklet, because to the extent our students are well-informed and know how to think clearly about their career and job choices, they are likely to experience enhanced well-being, meaning, and career satisfaction for the rest of their lives. I believe their contribution to the profession will reflect those benefits as well.