



## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

MICHAEL L. BARONI

# Launch of Amicus Alo: Caring for Our Members

Lawyers are the most stressed-out, depressed group of professionals in America. Attorney suicides are at six times the national rate. We suffer higher rates of heart attacks and have the highest rate of alcoholism (particularly in the first decade of practice, where a study of thousands of lawyers found that 21% engage in serious alcohol abuse—but the number is likely much higher, since most hide their addiction).

As lawyers, most of us work long, grueling hours due to demanding clients or supervisors with high (often unrealistic) expectations. Massive workloads and deadlines compel us to work at a frantic pace, in cycles of crushing exhaustion. Fierce competition and pressure to succeed drives us harder. We are “strong” and “on the ball” (or at least appear to be). *Note to reader: you may now be nodding in agreement.*

### A Call to Care for Each Other

This “perfect storm” of attorney stress paves the way for substance and alcohol abuse, decay or breakdown (mental, emotional, physical), and potentially lethal health problems. As one tragic example, Lisa M. Johnstone, then a Skadden Arps associate in Los Angeles, suffered apparent heart failure after working 100-hour weeks; her colleagues realized something must be wrong when she didn't show up to work . . . at her normal 4:00 a.m. start time.

As OCBA members, we frequently gather in friendly fashion, smiling and socializing. But how many of us are hiding our painful ailments and struggles? The sad fact is that most lawyers hide the addictions or ailments they are suffering. There is often a lot of pain behind the lawyer “mask” we wear.

My own General Counsel positions have entailed hyper-paced, 80+-hour weeks, filled with debilitating exhaustion.

### Enter Amicus Alo

*Amicus Alo* is Latin for “friend support and care.” As your OCBA President, I was excited to form the Amicus Alo Task Force, to help our fellow OCBA members who are disabled, or suffering from serious illness, alcohol or substance abuse, and/or mental/emotional issues, and to offer education on these issues.

Shirin Forootan serves as Amicus Alo's Chair. She also is an OCBA Board Member, and long-time Community Outreach Committee leader, who practices employment law at Call & Jensen. Shirin is pas-

sionately energized by the idea of reaching out to attorneys in need—and her vision expanded my original concept (focusing on disabilities and serious illness), to encompass the full scope of well-being issues we all face as lawyers.

Amicus Alo had its genesis in 2013, when I was campaigning for OCBA Secretary. I met attorney Merritt McKeon, who discussed with me the challenge of every solo practitioner: delivering top-rate legal services during times of illness. She asked, “Shouldn't there be some sort of support group for lawyers?” Like most great ideas, it seemed so obvious. Yet I was stunned by the realization that the OCBA, despite doing so much for others, had no form of support mechanism for its own members in need. Thus, Amicus Alo was born.

In June of this year, we launched Amicus Alo with a CLE event: *Managing the Impact on Your Legal Practice When Life Throws You Curve Balls*. Three outstanding panelists shared their personal wisdom: Justice David

A. Thompson, attorney Terrence Krieger (owner of small firm, Krieger & Kreiger), and large-firm defector Anne Brafford, Chair of the ABA's Attorney Well-Being Committee, and who founded Aspire (a consultant firm specializing in all aspects of attorney well-being). Thank you to these speakers—you are all true heroes for so candidly and humbly sharing your personal life experiences, to help others.

Amicus Alo's launch was a huge success (thank you Shirin and the OCBA staff)! It not only sold out, but had an

overflow of twenty more people hoping to squeeze in. Attendees represented a cross-section of the entire bar, including solo practitioners, large firm partners, young and veteran practitioners, and esteemed guests such as Judge James Gray (Ret.).

Notwithstanding, we have many important things to accomplish. My goal is for Amicus Alo to become a permanent fixture in the OCBA, leading the effort to assist lawyers with their hidden pains and challenges, which so many of us face.

Please email me at [united@ocbar.org](mailto:united@ocbar.org), if you have comments, ideas, or would like to join the task force. For statistics, source materials, and other information on attorney well-being, please contact Anne Brafford at [abrafford@aspire.legal](mailto:abrafford@aspire.legal).



L to R: Anne Brafford, OCBA President Michael Baroni, Terrence Krieger, Associate Justice David Thompson, OCBA Amicus Alo Task Force Chair Shirin Forootan, and Judge James Gray (Ret.)

**Michael L. Baroni** is the 2017 OCBA President. He can be reached at [united@ocbar.org](mailto:united@ocbar.org).

