

Episode Summary

Episode number: 113
Episode name: The Fortitude Project: Building a Mentally Healthy Profession
Guest(s): Jahan Kalantar

What area(s) of law does this episode consider? Vicarious trauma.

Why is this topic relevant? Vicarious trauma - that is, trauma experienced by an individual after empathetically engaging with someone else's trauma - is a pervasive concern within the legal profession, with our close exposure to our clients' problems. Because, alongside navigating legislation, regulations, case law - and other lawyers - practitioners often find themselves at the forefront of some of the most difficult moments in the lives of their clients.

What are the main points?

- The mental health of lawyers is impacted by the high-conflict nature of the profession
- Legal practitioners stand by clients during some of the worst moments of their lives, and this exposure can lead to emotional burdens for lawyers themselves.
- Personal experiences can also impact a lawyer's sensitivity to certain cases, such as resemblances to family members or personal connections to events.
- Vicarious trauma comprises emotional distress from dealing with clients' traumatic experiences.
- Strategies for maintaining well-being include understanding individual mental health needs and taking breaks from work.
- Delegating or work share arrangements can help alleviate vicarious trauma and provide a support system amongst coworkers.
- The legal profession is in a state of change, with an increase in lawyers starting their own practices to create healthier working environments.

What are the practical takeaways?

- Being self-aware of your own mental health, knowing personal triggers, and developing coping strategies is key.
- Support systems, like psychologists, psychiatrists, and GP relationships, are incredibly important. Sometimes these relationships take time to build.
- Change up your support system if you feel you don't quite mesh with a mental health provider.
- Work colleagues spend significant time together, and it's vital to support each other's mental health.

- Law firms should have strategies in place to prevent burnout and provide support for lawyers experiencing vicarious trauma.