



Talk on Wellbeing by Sir Mark Waller – Delivered on 26 September 2017 at Gray's Inn

1. I come at the whole subject of wellbeing from different angles. First I was a barrister and then a judge for over fifty years – pressure and dealing with pressure has been part of my working life. Second sadly my eldest son who worked in advertising took his own life twenty years ago certainly influenced by the pressure of work and the Charlie Waller memorial Trust set up in his memory has been doing what it can to help young people how to stay well and how to spot the signs of not being well.
2. My first message is obviously to underline the importance of keeping well physically and mentally. The reasons are obvious- first it is important to be happy in what you do and more pragmatically you are self employed and if you do not keep well no one is going to keep you.
3. So are there any tips for keeping well - the Trust founded a chair at Reading University called the Charlie Waller Institute which trains counsellors and carries out research in relation to helping young people to stay well- The Professor Shirley Reynolds gave a brilliant lecture the other day and I am going to adapt her simple message to working at the bar.
4. She talked of 5 pillars of wellbeing and they are worth remembering:-
 - a. Sleep – absolutely vital that you get a proper nights sleep- some people work late and some people are early birds and it does not matter which you are as long as you sleep properly and for a decent length of time at night; the macho image “I worked on this all night” – is absolutely counter productive for the pragmatic reason that what you are doing at 4 am is not efficient, and more important your performance the next day will be poor. As importantly- if you are not sleeping properly- the danger of depression and being mentally unwell so that it affects your work generally lies round the corner; if over a number of weeks you are not sleeping

properly take that as a warning sign to be acted on; or if you become aware that a colleague is not sleeping properly over a number of weeks then try and make sure the colleague gets help.

- b. Diet; again it is vital you eat properly and regularly- it too will affect your performance if you do not eat sensibly ; if you are in court missing having a sandwich because you want to prepare for the afternoon is again counter-productive. You need refuelling or you will not perform properly in the afternoon. On the even more serious side if you find that you are worrying to an extent that it is seriously affecting your eating habits over a period of weeks – going off your food or even comfort binge eating, take that as a warning sign and seek some help; if you notice over a period that a colleague appears worried all the time and has altered their normal eating habits, try and see that the colleague seeks help;–
- c. Activity; physical exercise is really important; it helps you feel well; it helps you sleep and helps you eat properly –this does not mean you have to go to gym every day; a good walk at a good pace getting off the tube a stop early will be good for you or of course not taking the tube at all but running to work or bicycling can provide the answer;
- d. Purpose; a sense of aiming and knowing what you have got to achieve helps to keep anxiety- the worry about having too much or too many difficult things to do- at bay; making a list is a good habit- if you are in court there may be no point but if not, write down when you start the day what you have got to do that day.
- e. Relationships- good relationships away from work are very important , but at the bar relationships at work are also important. A barrister’s life can be strangely isolated if you are not careful. At the junior bar in many cases you are on your own or even if you are being lead by a QC the QC has little time to worry about you and your work load. Clerks in the modern era are getting better but they can sometimes not notice

that someone is struggling. In my day pupillages were lengthy affairs with one pupil master which produced a bond which was a godsend to me when after pupillage I stayed on in chambers but still needed someone I could consult over difficult problems. It is good to remember that people find solving other people's problems a lot easier than solving their own- that can mean that a problem shared can often be more than a problem halved. Try and build relationships where people can share problems not just in difficult cases but personal worries too.

5. So those are the five pillars-but I have also some final tips. Some days will be bad and may produce negative thoughts – could have done something better; if only I had not asked the one question too many-my final speech was awful – I was so bad compared with X---well if it is something you can repair obviously repair it, but if it is not, do not ruminate on it – to ruminate will not make things better and indeed has a strong chance of making things worse- just remember everyone fails in some way at some time; learn from it and get on with the next thing.
6. Next, I love the tip of an American psychologist Dr Martin Seligman on how to be happy ; he advises all of us to think of the three happiest things that happened to us during the day each night before we go to sleep; if we do that we will sleep well and the habit will make us a happier person overall.
7. Finally - remember that the bar is not the whole of your life –family and friends outside the bar and interests outside the bar are important. Remember that life is full of ups as well as downs,- to which life at the bar will make its contributions both up and down--don't ruminate on the downs, and think of the three happiest things which happened to you during the day before you go to sleep at night.