

Therefore, vigilance to the dangers of misrepresentation can never be too great.

Key Components

- *Avoid making any false or deceptive statement about yourself or your services.*
- *Take responsibility to ensure that any work done or statement made on your behalf is fully accurate.*
- *Acknowledge and guard against the human tendency to self-aggrandize.*
- *Recognize that deception or duplicity in any form sabotages professional relationships.*

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Ensure Your Personal Fitness to Practice (Maintain Self-Care)

Yvonne was a rising star in her law firm. A highly recruited graduate of an Ivy League law school, she quickly established herself as a front-runner for early promotion to partner. Yvonne was held in high esteem by colleagues, feared by opponents in the courtroom, and respected in the legal community for her professionalism and attention to detail. With all her early successes, Yvonne was not well prepared, however, for the sudden death of her parents in an automobile accident. The resulting need to assume responsibility for two younger siblings and battle her depression in the months that followed proved to be too much. Her initial effort to maintain a regular work schedule was valiant. It was vintage Yvonne at work. But to her consternation, it wasn't long before she recognized that she was emotionally disengaged, overwhelmed, and, for the first time in her life, falling below her own standards of performance. It just was not like her to be ill prepared for meetings and proceedings. After consulting with two trusted colleagues and a close friend, she decided to take a leave of absence, followed by a return in half-time status. She accepted that this decision probably meant the end of her ambition for partner status. Although this was not an easy pill to swallow, she came to the conclusion that her ethical obligations to clients, her

own health, and her ability to be an effective caretaker demanded this course of action. Not only was she tremendously relieved by this decision, she received strong support from the firm's partners.

Integrity dictates that you admit when you are vulnerable to distress, fatigue, burnout, and impairment. Over the course of your professional life, it would be highly unusual to avoid occasional episodes of personal loss, relationship disturbance, or emotional turmoil. The question is not: Will distressing episodes occur? The more realistic questions are: When distressing episodes occur, will you be aware of them? Will you take appropriate action? Will you take the necessary steps to ensure that those with whom you engage professionally will not be harmed by your distress?

Acting with integrity requires self-awareness and blatant honesty when it comes to competence and personal psychological fitness. Ensuring adequate emotional health is a deeply personal matter. With few professions routinely screening its members for impairments, professionals must make an abiding personal commitment to their own mental health. Busy professionals are tempted to ignore, minimize, or rationalize signs of impairment. Going through a divorce, receiving a poor performance appraisal on the job, managing a chronic physical illness, or balancing the stressful demands of raising children, paying bills, and caring for aging parents can put professionals at risk for poor performance on the job, diminished energy, and perhaps incapacitation. When professionals are out of touch with their emotional lives, equate help-seeking or self-care with weakness, or remain determined to keep turmoil and distress private, they are making themselves substantially more vulnerable to ethically inappropriate behavior.

When circumstances, stressors, or phases of life conspire to create the risk of impairment, each of us has an ethical obligation to take action. We must be proactive about prevention and responsive in remediation. A number of proven steps help ensure fitness: (1) Begin by admitting that you are human and like other humans, vulnerable to distress and impairment; (2) Practice excellence in self-care, in-

cluding exercise, leisure time, spiritual reflection, and social relationships; (3) Develop strong collegial relationships so that trusted colleagues will confront you, support you, or cover for you if time off is necessary; (4) Know your limits, and say no when you become overextended; (5) Be alert to warning signs of distress such as emotional outbursts, fatigue, sleep disturbance, conflicts in relationships, missed appointments, lowered concentration, and forgetfulness; (6) Seek consultation from trusted friends and colleagues when you are distressed, and take their constructive feedback to heart; (7) Seek professional help when needed—especially if emotional distress or substance use become pronounced.

Ask yourself these important questions. If your impairment results in unprofessional conduct, would a jury of your peers conclude that you should have known that your personal problems might interfere with your professionalism? Because of the clear signs of impairment, would they agree that you took appropriate measures? Would they question why you did not obtain professional consultation or limit or suspend your professional activities until your impairment was resolved? In essence, was your response to your own distress adequate?

Being a professional requires adequate self-care. Self-awareness, self-regulation, intentional life balance, and an appreciation of one's vulnerabilities are essential. Remain vigilant to evidence of dysfunction in your professional life, and be proactive in addressing it.

Key Components

- *Appreciate your human vulnerability to distress and impairment.*
- *Maintain balance between work and leisure.*
- *Be vigilant and responsive to signs of impairment; don't ignore or minimize red flags.*
- *Maintain close connections to colleagues who will confront and assist you.*
- *Seek professional consultation if personal distress threatens to diminish your professionalism or create risk for those you serve.*