

INSPIRED TO SERVE: MENTAL HEALTH AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Section 3: Lesson in Advocacy

When Holly started her firm, the Gieszl firm, in 2010, she found that success doesn't come without challenge. Her kids were older at the time, giving her the freedom to focus her time and energy on starting the firm. She learned quickly to strictly control her schedule as a way to prevent vicarious trauma that stems from exposure to graphic or sensitive material.

"It's easy to get depressed listening to stories and seeing abuse up close," Holly notes, advising others to focus on the positive and prioritize their needs.

On an average day, Holly can receive up to 10 calls from clients who can talk for an hour. This alone is a full day's worth of work without considering other legal duties that need to be fulfilled.

Holly's advice? Know your role and set clear boundaries. Her job is not to act as a therapist, but to give legal advice to her clients when they need it. If something can wait, or a meeting is in the books, it's okay to be unavailable for unexpected calls so long as it's not a legal emergency. This also helps to prevent burnout, a phenomenon that's plagued hospitals and clinics that deal with serious mental illnesses, violence, and other stressful or traumatic events.

When you're at risk of physical harm for 40 hours a week, and you're getting paid the same salary as a fast-food chain employee, it's natural to look elsewhere for a job. Holly's college background in economics has taught her that people need good wages, hours, and work conditions to thrive. Resolving the high turnover rates in hospitals and clinics starts with prioritizing these three components.

My meeting with Holly further cemented my love for learning and participating in the field of criminal justice. Like academics who fill gaps in literature, it's our job to fill gaps in the system itself. Holly found her gap, working in criminal defense and medical law, specifically with people struggling with chronic mental illness. There is still much work to be done in countless areas, especially when geographic location determines the available resources and laws. I'm filled with a newfound motivation to locate the space I'm going to fill one day and change it for the better. Dedicating yourself to your passions and interests and working non-stop to highlight your strengths can make a massive difference for others. Because even if it's one person's life that's changed for the better, it's worth it.