

Work had been gradually affecting the wellbeing of Lila, a Barrister at a Western Circuit Chambers. But it was only when she hit the wall in December 2019 that she finally reached out for help.

December and January are always a busy time of the year for me, but I had even more on my plate than usual. A lot of major cases were coming up after Christmas, so I knew I wasn't going to get a break over the holidays. I'd also taken on too much outside of my day job.

I was involved in three other legal committees and was also responsible for a pupil in chambers. I was juggling a lot, on top of my practice.

It's hard to admit you're struggling when you have a job like ours. We are often looked on as the ones that should carry the load and manage pressure. I felt like I was admitting to a weakness.

The warning signs



It crept up on me. I was so used to being constantly busy that I didn't notice how exhausted I was. I started to realise something was not right when my sleep was being severely affected. There were about three weeks where I suffered almost total sleep deprivation.

One day, I just couldn't get out of bed and into work. It was as if my body had pressed the 'stop' button. My first steps were to contact my chambers and see my doctor. I hardly ever go to the doctors, so it was a big thing for me. I knew I needed help. I was prescribed medication and I referred myself for counselling.

Through the course of getting help, I realised I'd lost control over my life. My counselling sessions were very much work-focused, and it was really enlightening. Another friend who worked in the field recommended a specialist, which was so helpful.

Valuable lessons

The most useful thing I learnt was how to recognise the signs that I am struggling before everything spirals. It has also helped to make those close to me aware of these signs, so they can look out for me too, whether that's at work or in my home life. When you are in that really difficult place, it is very hard to recognise it in yourself.

I still get times of stress but I now have the tools to put an action plan in place so that things don't escalate.

I have been very fortunate with where I work currently. The Barristers within my chambers all look out for one another. The Bar Council Wellbeing Certificate has also been a really positive initiative. I'm not sure I would have felt able to speak out if the culture was not so supportive.

I really love my job. Yes, there are always moments that really challenge you, but I genuinely enjoy what I do and that makes it all worthwhile.

The advice I'd give anyone who is struggling is to please reach out, find someone you trust in the workplace and share what is going on. I'm really glad I did, and I also feel much more qualified to support others through my experience.

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