

BE WELL

Resiliency in the Ruts — Treating Mental Health with Motocross



There's a lot that goes into negotiating a turn in motocross. It's important to apply pressure to your brakes as you approach the corner, then let off as you enter the "rut." While in the rut, maintain your speed, lean into the corner and keep your head up, with your eyes looking towards the end of the rut.

This knowledge, as well as my growing passion for motocross, has provided key lessons in helping me navigate some ruts in my personal life and professional career as an attorney. Let me explain...

In May of 2020 I was living in Italy and was at the end of a five-year litigation assignment where I'd worked as a prosecutor and victims' counsel for the U.S. Air Force. I lived with my wife and three young children in the town of Sacile, which is about an hour from Venice. By this point in my career, I was already emotionally exhausted, having spent the entirety of my time in the Air Force reviewing and litigating sex crimes; specifically, crimes against children, sex assault, and rape cases. I'd represented countless clients, both service members and foreign nationals, who were entangled in the legal process after undergoing the trauma associated with being the victim of a crime.

Issues in my personal life compounded my exhaustion. Aside from the challenges of COVID, during which Italy suffered significant losses, we were awaiting biopsy results from a lump discovered in my wife's breast. The news we received was devastating—my 35-year-old wife had grade 3, aggressive, breast cancer. Our life was turned upside down.



Hebert family having fun.

I was extremely fortunate that the Air Force was able to find me a position in San Antonio, Texas, so that my wife could be near her family during treatment, but my new assignment further depleted my emotional tank. I'd been reassigned to Disability Counsel where I fought for military healthcare and retirement benefits for discharged service members.

My second week on the job, I was assigned my first client, a 39-year-old diagnosed with Stage IV terminal cancer. I'll

never forget the feeling of loss and hopelessness when I got off the phone with that client. I had tears streaming down my face and I knew that any added benefit I could provide wouldn't solve his actual problem — the cancer. Since then, I have represented numerous cancer clients as they fight for treatment, benefits, and dependent entitlements. As lawyers, we are told to "care" for our clients but don't care "too much" because it could lead to compassion fatigue. No one teaches you how to manage