

Most Inspiring Unsung Hero

Winner

**Jim Lawrence, Bryan Cave
Leighton Paisner**



This category recognises those who haven't received the recognition they truly deserve. This person will have demonstrated themselves as a huge support to someone else

Jim joined law firm Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner as an Associate in 2001 but life as a big law associate with a substance abuse disorder took its toll. He sought help and is now 14 years sober.

In 2020, Jim joined the newly created Global WellBeing Board. Having lived experience, he has been able to bring a different perspective on substance abuse. Having found a natural platform for his voice and experiences, Jim has helped the board continue to create a psychologically safe environment, removing the stigma associated with this topic and ensuring that people know where to get help and support if they need it.

Alcoholism is still very much a taboo subject, particularly within a law firm environment. Statistically, though, individuals in legal professions have reported higher rates of problematic drinking behaviours compared to other populations. However, it is not any easier for individuals to come forward and seek the help and support required.

Jim is an alcoholic with 14 years sobriety. He started drinking heavily as a teenager and continued to do so once he started work. He took on the notion that "real lawyers party as hard as they work".

Jim feared that if he stopped drinking, his legal career would be over but the drinking was damaging both in his home life and to his mental health. It was not until 2007 after



a particularly bad night, that Jim admitted he needed help.

Jim is very open about his experiences and has a desire to help others. Alongside the Global WellBeing Board, he has created a confidential and informal substance abuse network open to anyone who needs help. He describes it as "as loving and caring as any recovery group he's been part of". It's a confidential network, any pressure is removed and there is particular focus paid to concerns that individuals may have about reaching out.

Achievements

As part of Jim's role on the WellBeing Board, he learned of the UK's "This Is Me", storytelling initiative. Jim agreed to take part and share his story with his colleagues around the globe. It was so important that others heard Jim's story, not only to provide



WELLBEING ACTION PLAN - OVERVIEW

1. Ensure WellBeing is integrated throughout our global organization by promoting healthy and supportive working practices
2. Create a culture of belonging and psychological safety
3. Support, empower and educate our people
4. Ensure clear and consistent signposting to WellBeing support



Jim joined Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner's newly created Global WellBeing Board in 2020. He has helped the board create a psychologically safe environment for staff to discuss their wellbeing

hope, but also to help remove the stigma around addiction in the corporate world.

It was also a great opportunity to promote the network and the help available both internally and externally. Jim received an influx of support from colleagues, as well as others who shared their own stories/experiences. Many asked for his advice and guidance. He has also been happy to help individuals at the firm who may have family members/loved ones struggling with addiction and need advice.

Jim takes any opportunity to continue talking about this subject. He has taken part in panel events and introduced a number of webinars, openly talking about his own experiences. They have been on the subject of alcohol, but also wider topics such as men's health and wellbeing.

He has also spoken about his experiences externally, taking part in This Can Happen conferences in both the UK and US. Jim always wants to help, so jumped at the chance to discuss this topic with a much bigger audience and give hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel with the right help and support.

The judges were impressed by the way Jim supports not only people working at his law firm, but also their families. They also praised him for demonstrating that it's possible to be open about addiction while performing in a high-powered job. ■

Judges' comments

✦ Jim's story is inspirational and inspiring. To dismantle stigma in the legal profession, we need more people like Jim to come forward. I also love that Jim not only helps and supports people within his law firm, but also extends a hand to their family members and other loved ones

✦ I can relate so much to this story. What I love is that the fear of losing his job was not only dispelled but in recognising his intentions, his workplace actually got behind him and championed him. This will help countless others come forward

Highly Commended

→ Robert Wigmore & Lea Ghanem, Starbucks

Shortlisted

→ Emma Glenn, EssenceMediacom

→ Kate Peters, PeopleUnboxed