

One on One with **Dr. Angela White-Bazile:**

A Conversation About Vulnerability, Burnout and Building a More Supportive Legal Profession

Interviewed by Bradley J. Tate

Dr. Angela White-Bazile is a graduate of the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, Louisiana, now known as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She received her JD from Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge and she also has a Doctor of Psychology & Counseling.

Dr. White-Bazile is the Executive Director of the Louisiana Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP) since 2021 and has been a practicing attorney for more than 25 years. She held positions such as Judicial Law Clerk/Research Attorney at Orleans Parish Civil District Court, the 4th Circuit Court of Appeal and the Louisiana Supreme Court; Associate Attorney; and Professor of Law. She was also an In-House Counsel for Prudential Life Insurance in Jacksonville, Florida.

Prior to being named the Executive Director of JLAP, Dr. White-Bazile was the Executive Counsel at the Louisiana Supreme Court under the 25th Chief Justice, Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson.



Editor's note: The legal profession rewards strength, composure and the ability to solve other people's problems. Behind that capable exterior, however, judges and lawyers may be carrying struggles they feel unable to acknowledge, sometimes even to themselves.

Dr. Angela White-Bazile, executive director of the Louisiana Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP), wants members of the legal community to know they do not have to wait for a crisis before asking for help. In this conversation with 2025–27 LSBA Secretary and Louisiana Bar Journal Editor Bradley J. Tate, who served six years on the JLAP Board, White-Bazile discusses the experiences that brought her to JLAP, the profession's tendency to treat overwork as a badge of honor and her vision for creating a more proactive culture of support. Her message is both personal and practical: Self-care is not a luxury, vulnerability is not weakness, and JLAP is an advocate, not an adversary.

Tate: It was a privilege to spend six years on the Board of the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program and I'm glad you're sitting down with me to talk about JLAP. To start, tell me about Angela.

White-Bazile: I guess if I were to describe myself, I would talk about being a mother. It's important that I acknowledge my kids because they allow me to share myself with others. I'm talking about beyond the eight hours, beyond the ten hours, beyond the weekend calls or the evening calls. So I'm a mother, the youngest of six, a native of New Orleans (whoo-hoo!), former Queen of Selene. A member of my sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, New Orleans Alumnae Chapter. An active member in the community, not only in St. Tammany, but in the legal community.

Tate: Why did you want to come to JLAP?

White-Bazile: JLAP, I felt, was my next level of assistance. First, I was part of the reviewing agency, the Supreme Court, which is the court of last resort,

where I was a research attorney. Then, going from research attorney to executive counsel, I was able to look at judges and lawyers, and their cases, and their judgments, and their opinions. As executive counsel, I learned not only about the issues judges and lawyers face professionally, but also that they are human.

JLAP was the next best step because now I get to help those I've seen fall short or go through things they couldn't even talk about. Now I can help them on a whole different level. When I was executive counsel, judges and lawyers, especially those in executive positions, would come to my office and disclose certain things about what they were going through. They trusted me, and I was able to help them. So, I look at it as a natural, elevated step in coming to JLAP.

Tate: Of all the titles you've accumulated, which feels the most like you? Which one says the most about you as a person?

White-Bazile: I would say human. Flawed, yet favored to have a supportive village to corral and encourage and advocate for me. I know that everybody has an "it." But if I look at all my titles, the title that really describes me the most is servant. Not lawyer, not counselor, not realtor, not published author, not advocate, but servant. Because that's how I operate when all eyes are closed, when people can't see me.

Tate: You spent more than 20 years working in Louisiana's judiciary, including serving as executive counsel to Chief Justice Johnson. What did you learn behind the scenes about judges and lawyers that changed the way you see the profession?

White-Bazile: First of all, I realized that judges are human. I realized that lawyers are the voice for other people, but who's going to speak for them? My motto in life is "to whom much is given, much is required." And oftentimes, as judges, their truth is muzzled. They need a voice, and often they need a release, just to be who the citizens have elected them to be. They quickly mask up because of a fear of being unjustly

persecuted.

So, one of the things I learned working with Justice Johnson is that there are many judges who need somebody to advocate for them. And there are lawyers who are great in the eyes of everybody else. They may be public successes, but behind the scenes they may be operating in what are called private failures. And they have nobody to say to, "I'm failing at this," or "I'm not good at that." Nobody gets a place or an avenue to actually release the fact that "I'm struggling." Nobody gets to really talk about their weaknesses.

Tate: You tell lawyers to make time for things that bring them joy. What brings you joy that has absolutely nothing to do with the law, or JLAP, or helping anybody?

White-Bazile: I was getting ready to say seeing other people smile. One thing about me is that in a room, I'm not listening to what is being said. I'm listening to what's not being said. I'm the one looking around and seeing that person who may be going through something, but nobody pays attention to them. I'm the one who'll call the strong person, or let the strong person know, "I'm there for you."

But you asked what I would like to do other than helping others, because helping others would be first. I like to shop. I like to dance. I like to sing. I like to speak life into dying situations and encourage people. I like to bring out a smile where there's a frown, and actually get to the root of what's going on so that I can help you. Because I feel like everything we do is a seed sown. And if it's a seed sown, if I sow as many seeds as I can to help so many others, then when it's my time, somebody will turn around and sow back into me.

Tate: What do you do when you realize you're taking on too much? Are you good at following your own advice?

White-Bazile: Let me tell you something about me, and it's something that I say: The reason I'm so good at what I do is that oftentimes I'm preaching to the choir. I'm preaching to myself. I have those experiences where I have to

step outside myself sometimes. I have to realize, “Wait a minute, I, too, need to stop. I, too, need to take a minute and breathe.”

I’m a very selfless person, and one of the things I say all the time is that being selfish is not good, but being selfless is not good, either. And I know that one of my “its” is being selfless. I will fight for the world. I will take on any giant. But the giants within me, that inner me, is what I battle with. And I know that’s the battle of many people, because we mask well. And as lawyers, I find, we mask well.

Tate: That we do. When you sit down to write the JLAP Lawyers Assistance column that runs regularly in the *Louisiana Bar Journal*, do you imagine a particular reader? Is there a message you want to return to because you think they need to hear it?

White-Bazile: When I’m writing for the *Journal*, I look at what’s current, or what I imagine is about to happen, or what’s burning. I like to be as proactive as possible without speaking fear or anxiety into the reader. I like to tell them the truth, because I know the only thing that’s going to set us free is the truth. And oftentimes people don’t like to deal with the truth. We like to deal with an imaginary thing called life, but we really need to deal with truth. And truth is sometimes hard to convey, and sometimes it’s hard to actually believe it yourself.

One of the things I would like to convey to a particular reader, and one of the columns I’ll go back to all the time, is that self-care is not a luxury. It’s a necessity. And being present. We work to build these empires, and work hard, because we’re saving up, because we want to be, you know, all that. We want to leave a legacy, we want to leave a name, but we forget to be in the present. And being mindful is truly a state that we must practice. If I had it my way, I would do an eight-hour retreat that just teaches us how to de-stress, how to be mindful, how to stop getting ahead of ourselves and to just take a minute to be present. Like now, Brad. Just be present.



“...JLAP is your advocate,
not your adversary...”

Tate: You’ve written in the *Bar Journal* about lawyers being all dressed up on the outside but empty on the inside. How good are lawyers at fooling everybody, including themselves, when something’s wrong?

White-Bazile: In the nature of our profession, there’s the outward manifestation of an inward struggle. When people talk about a disease, they think of alcohol or drug addiction. But mental health struggles can have outward manifestations, too. And the nature of those struggles is that they can lie to us. Depression can lie to us. It can distort how we see what happened in the past, overwhelm us in the present and make us afraid to look toward the future. And we don’t want anybody to know that we’re afraid, because we’re supposed to be the ones with all the answers when we have questions ourselves.

The thing about it, though, is that these struggles lie to us. We’re dressed up. We’re like a properly manicured lawn, but a junky house. We have so much going on inside. That’s why we don’t sleep. We don’t rest. We may sleep, but we don’t rest, because we’re

always thinking about the next move. And that’s why the world looks at us as paid worriers. We always worry about something, instead of sitting back and saying, “Wait a minute. This thing is going to work itself out. I can only do as much as I can do.”

If I could just get lawyers to understand that it is very fruitful to ask for help. But we don’t want to ask for help, because we’re too full of pride. We don’t want anybody to know that we’re about to snap. And I think it’s important that we realize that we can call. I want to build a foundation where people feel like it’s okay to ask for help, and it’s okay to be vulnerable in this place. And that’s something that’s hard to do with lawyers and judges.

Tate: Your columns are effective because they often ask the reader a very direct question: What do I need to do to thrive? Who comforts the comforter? What happens when you’re battling yourself? Is there a question that’s been hard for you to ask, or to answer?

White-Bazile: There are several questions that may be hard to answer.

But I'm glad that I have the opportunity to ask whatever needs to be asked, because if we don't ask the question, we won't open the door. I think what JLAP does is open the door to an initial conversation about getting help, or finding the support that's needed. Often, as conquerors, when we feel that we're conquered, we don't know where to go. I may not always have the answer, but I can and will do what I need to get you to a place where you can get that answer.

Tate: If you could make all Louisiana lawyers read one column that you've written, which one would it be?

White-Bazile: It would definitely be the one about self-care, about mindfulness. But I can say this: I believe the columns should have a place in your library, in your personal Rolodex, so that depending on what you're going through in life, you can read what you need at that time. Because everybody's in a different season, and everybody's going through something different. That's what's good about the columns. If you lay them all out, you can say, "Well, what am I going through at this time?" and then just go to it. I wish there was a way you could just press a button and say, "I'm going through burnout," or "I'm going through alcoholism," or "I need encouragement," and it would come up and speak volumes to you.

What I want the columns to be is spoken word. I wish I could put them all on tape. No, really, because this is what I get after I speak: Lawyers and judges come up and say, "I can hear your voice all the time." Not to brag, because it's just a gift. But if I could read those columns and just encourage...

I wrote a book. But I wrote a book, and it's entitled *I'm Just Saying*. It's a book of poetry, and it just encourages. It talks about where your mind goes and how you've gone through some things, but it gives you encouragement at the end. It says, yes, we're going to talk about the problem, but we're going to talk about a solution, too. If everybody could just press a button and hear that, because even when you don't feel like reading you could just listen and get that down in your psyche, then you'd know there's somebody who understands that



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we're all going through something. That's what I want.

Tate: Let's talk about JLAP itself. If a lawyer is reading one of your columns and they think, "My problem isn't bad enough to call..."

White-Bazile: Okay.

Tate: ...but they think they have something, what's their next step?

White-Bazile: The next step is to call us anyway. And I'm going to tell you why. If you think you've mastered it, I want to hear it, because you may be the one I need to connect with somebody else: a lawyer helping another lawyer. You may be the very person I need to talk to, so that I can get you to talk to that person I may not be able to reach. So yes, I want you to call, and I want you to feel comfortable.

One of the visions I have for JLAP is to be an epicenter where people can call and release it, and they don't have to worry about what's to come. They don't have to let fear of discipline, scrutiny or worry about losing their licenses stop them. Because that is the reason people do not call. JLAP provides a confidential place where they can start addressing what they're going through and feel more comfortable.

Oftentimes when I talk to people, especially dignitaries, they'll say, "Oh my God, I feel so much better." Because the first thing I'm going to do is let them know: You may be dealing with this, but I'm dealing with that. So now we can take off all the masks. We can know that everybody's dealing with something, so let's just get to it, because there are things that you may be able to help me with, and that I can help you with as well.

Tate: What behavior do you see normalized in legal culture that you wish lawyers would stop treating as normal?

White-Bazile: I would want them to stop wearing burnout as a badge of honor. There are lawyers who are burned out and don't even know it. I want them to stop glamorizing overworking: "Oh, I've worked 18 hours. I've been up. I've had very little sleep." Well, guess what? You're not just a danger to yourself. You're a danger to the legal community. You're a danger to society. You could have a wreck because you don't have the proper rest. You're really not operating at your fullest when you are overworked.

And if I could, I'd get law firms to understand the need to take a minute and to give people time for mental health days. It's not just a vacation. You need that person. Listen, I believe this holistically: To whom much is given, much is required. If you have somebody out there who's just knocking it out of the park, who's getting ready to be a partner, just realize that person needs rest. That person needs encouragement. That person needs appreciation. And that person needs a vacation.

We need to stop minimizing vacation and stop thinking that vacation is CLEs. And I'm not saying it's not great to go to Destin, because it is. But what do you do in your downtime? When do we get that downtime? We all need it. We need to stop thinking that when you're at a conference, just because you're staying in a nice hotel, that's downtime. It's not, because you're steady running. We need downtime. And we need to stop apologizing for the fact that we need more than what we're getting.

Tate: Let's see where we're going next. What do people fear will happen when they call JLAP, and what actually happens?

White-Bazile: They feel that they're going to be disciplined. They feel that they will lose their license. They feel that they'll lose more. But when you call JLAP, I want to set up a foundation where you can address what you're going through and be more inclined to share. You'll go through a process of support instead of discipline: a process of being a better version of yourself,

where you can operate at your fullest.

I want you to be at a place where (and this is what I say often) JLAP is your advocate, not your adversary. We are here to help you be the best version of yourself. If I could get people to be the best version of themselves, then we wouldn't have to worry about what's going to happen to the public, because the public, society, the community, all of that is going to take care of itself.

Tate: So, since you've come to JLAP, JLAP has changed, and the legal community sees that. What's next for JLAP?

White-Bazile: I would like to do retreats. I want to get into law firms and actually show them how to address stress and conflict in the workplace. Rather than dealing with people only when they're at a point where they need to be punished, I want firms to be proactive, so that people can be the best version of themselves, and firms can get greater work from people by appreciating them. I want to teach firms the value in their associates and their soon-to-be partners.

I want to get out into the law schools more and talk to law students. I want to let them know what's to come without creating fear and let them know that we're equipped to help them where they are. I want to reach them even earlier by talking to college students, and say, "Hey, if you've got some issues, let's work through them together. You want to go to law school? Let's get it together before you enter the profession." Let's get ahead of it.

I want to get with those who are subject to a gag order or other confidentiality restrictions, like the judges and other legal professionals, as well as their spouses and families — people who are in distress. I want to sit down with them and really support them, so I can help. That's why we extended JLAP to include not only judges, lawyers and law students. We included the legal community. We included their staff, because I figure if I can get their whole community, their whole tribe, their whole village together, then we can have a healthier chamber or law office.

I want to get to the point where other agencies realize that they need a JLAP,



or some type of assistance, so that they can have that sensitivity to what their professionals are going through. I want them to realize that because you have these CEOs, COOs, CCOs, these people in these positions, they need an outlet. They need some type of relief, because unchecked stress and burnout can contribute to serious concerns, including depression and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts. We need to deal with that and create opportunities for people to seek help before they reach a crisis.

I want to be a voice. I want to be the reason. I want to be that liaison who can go and sit and talk. I want to meet with just the partners, or the owners of firms, those people who are doing great and mighty things but have no idea. They've disconnected from the struggles of starting out. I want partners and law firm owners to understand that, yes, your associate may be struggling and need access to support, an evaluation or treatment. I want to see fewer barriers to obtaining that care, including better access to insurance coverage.

We have big things ahead. I see the open door, but it's going to take everybody rallying behind everybody so that we can get this stuff done.

Tate: JLAP is a confidential, non-disciplinary entity. What services does JLAP provide, and what can someone expect when they call?

White-Bazile: When you call JLAP, you will have an assessment. You'll talk to a clinician, or you'll get me, and we'll

do an assessment that evaluates what's going on with you. Not everybody who comes to us automatically goes into treatment. We will assess what's going on with you. You might just need a book. You might just need encouragement. You might just need to be heard. You might need somebody to just listen to what's going on with you. So, you have an assessment, and then we'll guide you from there. We'll be an advocate. We'll hold your hand. We'll support you. We'll let you know what's needed, so that you can get help if there's help that you need.

Sometimes I get lawyers who come in and they don't have gas, and they don't have food, and it's not only that they're unemployed, but they also don't have any money... I understand it, because I've been there. I want to do everything I can to connect people with support. And that's why it's so important for me to have sufficient staff to cover the administrative work and the other work, so that I can get out there and do what I'm called to do.

Tate: If someone reading this knows they need help but feels too overwhelmed to reach out, what do you want that person to know?

White-Bazile: I want them to know that JLAP is here to help. If I hear someone is in trouble and too overwhelmed to reach out, I want to do everything I can to connect that person with support. Wherever they are and whatever they're facing, I want them to know they do not have to face it alone.