

Licensed Professional Program



Sierra Tucson unravels the Complexities of Identity, Expectations, and the Mental Health Struggles of Licensed Professionals

For many of us, what we do for a living is often the singular lens through which we see ourselves. Thanks to societal expectations and cultural norms, our identity is closely connected to the work we perform. Being an expert in medicine, in business, or in law, is recognized and often admired by society. Yet, the idea of who we are and who we should be based on our career accomplishments is also self-imposed.

Often for licensed professionals the letters behind the name – John Doe, CEO or Jane Doe, MD, etc., weigh heavily on the expectations that they carry with them. Those letters can lead us to perceive the individual as not just an expert, but also often as superhuman.

Rather than an individual with feelings, insecurities, hopes, and dreams, like everyone else, we can often see licensed professionals one-dimensionally. For highly revered physicians, veterinarians, lawyers, pilots, and so many others in high stress and high responsibility professions, that is very often where problems can start. Not understanding one's identity can be the basis for feeling lost, and can many times lead to individuals isolating themselves, becoming depressed, addicted, and in the most extreme cases, suicidal.

The Licensed Professional Program at Sierra Tucson was developed to help those in high-stress professions who are under tremendous pressure, work long hours, and may suffer sleep deprivation. They are often confronted with life-and-death, financial, and reputational challenges. to seek hope and healing. Seeking hope and healing, Sierra Tucson's groundbreaking program is suited for licensed professionals such as:

- Attorneys
- CEOs
- Clinicians (LCSW, LPC, LMFT),
- Dentists
- Nurses
- Nurse Practitioners
- Pharmacists
- Physicians
- Physician Assistants
- Pilots
- Psychologists
- Veterinarians



A Case Study - Henry

Henry was a physician who followed in the footsteps of his father, also an MD. When Henry began to recognize that he was drinking excessively, was chronically unhappy, and no longer enjoyed the things in life he used to love, he sought help through the Licensed Professional Program at Sierra Tucson.

At the start of the program, Henry was closed-minded and not engaged. Yet it became apparent that he was listening and absorbing some of the concepts being taught. One day during a process group session, he suddenly experienced a life-altering revelation. Becoming hyper aroused and starting to panic, he said aloud - "I just realized that I sound like my father! And I look like my father! I don't want to be him!"

He also admitted that he was discovering a lot about himself. He began to understand that he was dealing with a fear of abandonment and of not being seen or heard. In his darkest days, alcohol became his coping mechanism. Yet, he admitted during treatment that he didn't even like drinking or the feeling of being intoxicated. He was simply looking for a way to dull his insecurities and escape his confusing and uncertain feelings.

Those realizations were liberating for him. Yet, they were also disturbing and shocking. He understood for the first time that he didn't know who he was, and that he was relying on an identity that he created that was ultimately not serving him well. He uncovered that his identity was not in alignment with his feelings and emotions of who he truly was down deep. At that moment, this new awareness represented a quantum leap in his recovery.

Enrolling in the Licensed Professional Program at Sierra Tucson helped Henry open his eyes and allowed him to see his life in a completely different light. With the help from the tools he gained during treatment, he uncovered the underlying cause for his drinking and his misery. The Program cleared up many mysteries for him and was key to discovering his "aha moment" that set him on a radically different path toward sobriety and finding who he was and what he wanted in life.

Today Henry has been sober for 16 months. His professional and personal life have blossomed. He opened a second medical clinic, and he is in a new relationship. His life turned around. Henry isn't alone. Highly respected and being in a position of authority, Henry didn't allow himself to explore his own feelings and insecurities prior to starting treatment. As a physician, he was expected to be infallible. Those unreasonable expectations created blind spots that are common for many individuals and don't permit them to explore and uncover what is propelling their depression, substance abuse, or other challenges to their emotional health.



Why a Program Specific for Licensed Professionals?

Many times, high-achieving individuals who are licensed professionals naturally have elevated expectations of themselves. It's easy for those expectations to morph to a point where individuals begin to gradually accept nothing short of perfection in everything that they do. That is not a sustainable or healthy way to live. Some of these individuals spiral into relying on coping mechanisms such as drugs or alcohol. Others fall into deep depressive states and become increasingly isolated, losing interest in what previously brought them joy.

As a result, some individuals can suffer from serious mental health issues that often go unaddressed. The unique challenges of their professions often mean extraordinary levels of responsibility and consequently those expectations can begin to affect the mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of a licensed professional's life. Additionally, the fear of stigma for seeking mental health therapy or the fear of colleagues or friends "finding out," is also an obstacle for many to get help.

Practicing licensed professionals aren't the only ones at risk for mental health struggles. Life changes, such as retirement, can spur concerning behavioral changes. Many people who once closely identified with their occupation can suddenly feel purposeless and resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol or other substances. Retirement is a major life transition for a licensed professional who was accustomed to the rapid-fire demands of their job and the accompanying responsibility and respect they received from colleagues and subordinates.

Whether individuals recognize it for themselves, or they are urged to seek professional help in connection with peer assistance services, a professional wellness program, employee assistance program (EAP), or other professional association specific to their career, the Licensed Professional Program is designed to provide holistic healing. When professionals can see themselves first as individuals, they can find a new lease on life by regaining their voice enabling them to regain power over their own lives.

Sierra Tucson helps licensed professionals spend the necessary time to do the essential work to engage in their own recovery journey where they can process the realizations that surface through therapy and treatment. Allowing individuals to reclaim their true selves in a balanced and healthier way, helps them get to a place where they can be more efficient in their work, happier and more satisfied within their personal lives, and ultimately more productive contributors to society once again.



Professions at Risk

- The American Bar Association's Task Force on Lawyer Well Being ranked lawyers eighth in a study of suicide by occupation, with a rate of 1 1/3 times the national average. Compared to other professions, lawyers suffer higher rates of depression, stress, and anxiety.
- A 2019 study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that veterinarians are dealing with a high level of burnout. Turnover rate is 16 percent (which is higher than physicians). Additionally, female and male veterinarians were 3.5 and 2.5 times as likely to die by suicide, respectively, compared with the general population.
- Spurred by the pandemic, a 2022 Medscape survey found that more than half of physicians said they are feeling burned out, up from 42 percent in 2018 and 47 percent in 2021. Approximately 25 percent reported being depressed, most citing job burnout as the reason for their depression. In addition, over a third of doctors said they don't want to tell others about their depression, concerned about the stigma associated with physicians seeking mental health support. Forty percent believe people will think less of their professional abilities. They also fear being "found out" by the medical board or their employer.
- In Medscape's 2022 Nurse Practitioner Burnout & Depression Report, six out of 10 nurse practitioners report burnout and nearly 40 percent report they are depressed.

While those suffering from mental health struggles are each confronting different circumstances, there are some general characteristics that may be warning signs that an individual needs help, including:

- Isolation. Human beings are social creatures. When you start noticing big changes in personality or habits, especially when someone who was previously very social is now increasingly missing from events or purposely isolating, beware.
- Losing interest in activities previously enjoyed (anhedonia). Another sign which can be a cause for concern is when an individual is no longer taking part in hobbies previously enjoyed.
- Rage. Angry outbursts can signal something is amiss. Are there more heated disagreements with loved ones or are more confrontations popping up at work?
- Physical health issues. Body aches, gastrointestinal issues, headaches, and other sudden physical symptoms may increase when someone is struggling. If it is associated with going into the office or workplace, or they surface in tandem with stressful work issues, pay attention and start connecting the dots.

Sierra Tucson: Uniquely Suited to Help Licensed Professional Regain Their Lives

The comprehensive and humanistic approach that Sierra Tucson employs in each program including mood, pain, trauma, addiction, or co-occurring disorders is also reflected within the Licensed Professional Program. Regardless of which primary program track an individual enters, therapy is customized for their unique circumstance to ensure that each individual's needs are met.

With a treatment team that consists of experienced experts including psychiatrists, psychologists, naturopaths, therapists, physicians, and specialists from a variety of fields, individuals receive a range of therapies that start with a psychiatric evaluation, and thorough discussion of medical history. Every individual also receives a complete physical examination to understand what physical health factors may be contributing to their mental health concerns. This signature approach is unique to Sierra Tucson. When it comes to diagnosing mental health conditions, many facilities and physicians don't screen for nutrient deficiencies or hormonal imbalances although they can be a major contributor to an individual's mental health challenges. Instead there is a tendency to prescribe medications first, often without supporting lab work or considering the possibility that supplements can make a difference. In addition, too many times, individuals rely upon medications or prescriptions that often overlap from the many different prescribers or providers they have seen in the past. At Sierra Tucson, while medications are continued for patients as needed, the focus is often on de-prescribing and training individuals to instead build their healing around tools they learn in treatment. This "cleaning house" approach helps individuals start fresh. All the while, individuals benefit from the peer support and community that surrounds them, many times enabling them to open their mind to see themselves differently.

The 30-45-day Licensed Professional Program ranges from a daily schedule of evidence-based therapies like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, EMDR, equine therapy, and individual therapy, to integrative therapies and therapeutic recreational activities. In addition, treatments like acupuncture and therapeutic massages allows the mind and body to decompress and move past the threshold of anxiety.

For some professionals they may start the program resentful that they may be in treatment under court orders or as mandated by their monitoring agency. Yet, like Henry, the positive impact of the recovery community, the expertise of the staff, and the peace they find at Sierra Tucson often infiltrate any self-imposed obstacles to healing. Even if they begin their treatment fearful or resistant, individuals often find that they are not treated as the CEO or MD that there are from life outside of treatment. Nor are they labeled as "depressed" or as an "addict." Instead, the Licensed Professional Program is about treating the individual as an individual, not as their occupational status, title, or labeled by their condition.

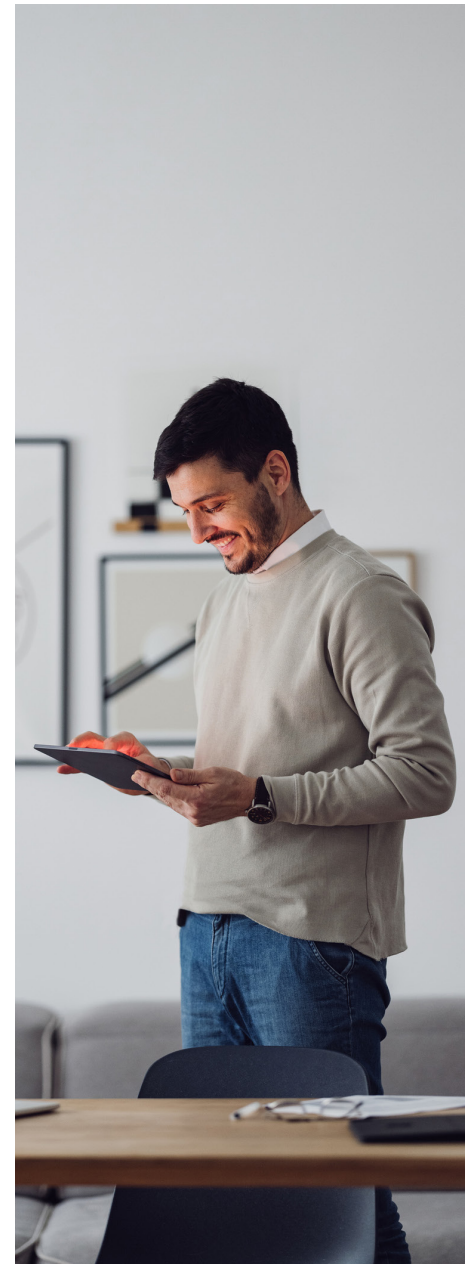
The goal of all programs at Sierra Tucson is to remove the shame and guilt that many carry and to instead focus on the individual's potential to overcome their struggles and accomplish their goals. By reframing their perspective and applying the new tools learned in treatment on how to be more adaptable and flexible, individuals gain comfort in allowing themselves to be more vulnerable in admitting that it is okay not to be okay.

Regardless of the reasons that brought them into treatment, the flexibility and customization of the Licensed Professional Program allows individuals to experience a multitude of modalities that suit the resident's needs. If an individual is experiencing substance abuse and an eating disorder for example, he/she will experience care and therapies that may begin with detox stabilization and eventually transition to residential care with therapies suited for co-occurring disorders.

Life After Sierra Tucson

Once individuals leave treatment at Sierra Tucson, they are supported through the Connect365 Program. Designed to bridge the gap between residential treatment and life in recovery, Connect365 is available for free for the first 12 months. It offers participants the tools they need to enjoy a strong recovery program while maintaining daily contact with their team for guidance and support. Participants gain access to an effective and user-friendly app that keeps them connected and engaged by promoting responsibility, accountability, and connection.

In addition, the treatment team for the individuals who participate in the Licensed Professional Program maintains contact with all associated entities (such as professional boards, monitoring agencies, EAPs, etc.) by providing the required information and reports that detail the progress of the participant to help them regain their license and their professional standing. With a strong network of providers throughout the country, participants are also provided with referrals for inpatient intensive outpatient programs (IOP) and partial hospitalization programs (PHP) to ensure that the patients continue to have the tools that they need to be successful.



A 30-Day Snapshot of Life in Treatment

While every individual's treatment journey is unique, it is not uncommon for individuals to take some time to settle in and get comfortable with their new routines in treatment. During the first week while individuals are becoming acquainted with the staff, the facility, and their schedules, it is likely there will be some resistance and fear.

The second week as individuals become more exposed to evidence-based practices, multiple classes, lectures, and one-on-one sessions throughout their days, resistance wanes and engagement grows. At this point, individuals begin to understand how the tools and techniques they are learning will be useful for a lifetime journey of successful recovery.

Often, there are many revelations during the second and third weeks propelled by their own self-inventory that they learn to conduct and assess. The safe space that Sierra Tucson offers helps individuals verbalize the struggles they are facing, and often surface enlightening moments, where the pieces of the puzzle begin to come together.

Week four is when individuals begin to take the tools they have learned and start applying them. Together with the resident, the treatment team works to create a plan for them to move forward once they leave treatment.



