

Law Firms That Put Employees' Well-Being First Get A Lot More In Return

Legal employers who do not take lawyer well-being seriously are missing out on important opportunities to have better lawyers.

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More and more, the legal industry is focusing on the mental health challenges faced by attorneys. In "Battling an 'Epidemic' of Loneliness Among Lawyers," Tyger Latham is quoted as saying that lawyers enter the profession with the dream of helping people and making society better only to be faced with billable hour requirements, dull, isolating document reviews and constant connectivity to the job. This has resulted in nearly 30% of lawyers dealing with depression and 20% with anxiety, according to a 2016 study by the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation and the American Bar Association. The National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being issued a report titled "The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change." Twenty-nine states have established working groups or task forces and have revised regulations related to continuing legal education (CLE) programming and to bar admissions to address wellness issues. May was Mental Health Awareness month and the week of May 4, was designated as Lawyer Well-Being Week, an initiative of the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being in conjunction with the American Bar Association. It's gratifying to see that hundreds of law firms participated across the country.

Legal employers who do not take lawyer well-being seriously are missing out on important opportunities to have better lawyers. I am no stranger to the lawyer-life balance struggle. I work full time at Marshall Dennehey Warner

Coleman & Goggin. I am raising two children with my attorney husband. But from 2003 to 2019, I was fortunate to be able to work part-time. Over those years, I was an active member and served in the leadership of the Bucks County Bar Association. I was a Board Member of the Central Bucks Family YMCA; now the Doylestown Branch of the YMCA of Bucks County. My flexible schedule also allowed me to make time for physical fitness and exercise. Before gyms were closed by COVID-19 restrictions, I tried to get to the Y at least five days a week. Even now, I train in my basement three to five days a week (it's not ideal). Exercise saves my mental health, no question. I do not want to gloss over this. Exercise saves me from drinking too much, depression, anxiety and stress.

While I was still working part-time, in spring 2017, I got the crazy idea to become certified as a group fitness instructor. I was at the Y almost every day, so why not lead a class or two? In October 2017, I passed the ACE Group Fitness Instructor exam. I taught at our Y one to three times a week for about a year. In January 2019, I obtained a personal trainer certification. In May 2019, I became a Les Mills GRIT instructor. Les Mills offers various licensed exercise formats ranging from yoga to spinning and GRIT is its high intensity interval training format. I created a Facebook page to post the workouts for those who could not attend class. I read up on interval training; resistance training for endurance vs.

hypertrophy vs. power; studied skeletal and muscular anatomy; and I read fitness industry publications on a fairly regular basis.

None of this would be possible without an employer that allowed me to attend to my well-being. Marshall Dennehey has employed me in some role or another, from file clerk in 1992 to special counsel today. This is my only adult job, and the only job I ever intend to have. The firm works hard to create a positive culture. I truly like all of the people with whom I work. I think that employers often think of labor or payroll as their biggest expense. But I have felt that Marshall Dennehey's purpose is not just to provide excellent legal services, but also to provide people with fulfilling places to work and grow.

Because I have been able to attend to my well-being, I have a sense of meaning and purpose. I have an opportunity to engage and grow in BOTH of my professions. It has helped me build a network of support. I am emotionally and physically strong. It has made me a better employee than I would otherwise be. As I became more confident as a group exercise instructor and personal trainer, I felt that confidence bleeding into my practice. As I found my voice teaching at the Y, I felt I rediscovered my voice as an attorney. As I dug deeper into creating functional training programs, my curiosity in general was reignited, and I found myself digging deeper in my legal research. As I worked at building my fitness brand and online presence, I felt more confident to work at building my lawyer brand and online presence. I realized that all of my new information about the muscles of the shoulder was bleeding into my torn rotator cuff slip-and-fall case. I realized that my YMCA board and employee experience provides a mountain of knowledge other

lawyers do not have. Teaching my students and clients that they are bound to fail the first time they try a clap pushup taught me that I may fail the first time I try a new legal skill. Encouraging my students and clients to set goals, like 10 pushups on their toes at the end of six weeks, reminded me that I need to set goals for myself as a lawyer.

Just as I have to give my students and clients a chance at mastery, so must legal employers give their professionals room to try something they have not done before, and then try again when they fail. Law firms must recognize that lawyers taking care of themselves are not taking away from their profession. Lawyers taking care of themselves are making themselves more valuable members of the team. The legal industry will only benefit from giving their team members space for non-legal personal growth. When someone takes a day to attend a fitness convention, to attend their non-profit board retreat or just takes a day off, they are not doing so at their employer's expense. They are investing in themselves, and that makes them better employees. "Lawyer Well-Being" is not just a trendy business buzz phrase. It is a goal that makes for a strong law firm workforce, which makes for good business. How are you going to achieve it?



Michele Frisbie, special counsel at Marshall Dennehey Warner Coleman & Goggin, defends a wide variety of cases and has a special interest in working closely with professionals to achieve the successful, cost-effective defense of suits against specialists such as those involved in the sale, appraisal and management of real estate; insurers and insurance brokers and agents; attorneys; mental health service providers and municipal entities.