



A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LAW FIRM WELLNESS

BY NICOLE DOTY AND ELLEN SCHULHOFER, ESQ.

An increasing number of law firms are launching wellness initiatives to combat the common stresses of attorney life. This article reviews the initiatives used by the firm of Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck (Brownstein), as an example of the type of programs that can be implemented by law firms in Nevada and worldwide in order to support the wellness of their employees.

Over the years, Brownstein has made wellness a priority, and this has culminated in its current robust program that takes a holistic approach to considering physical, mental, emotional, financial and environmental well-being. A strong sense of community is seen as a key component of its workers' well-being and is ingrained into its culture. One of the firm's four core values is "Giving Back," and the energy Brownstein employees put into pro bono work and donating time and resources to community organizations and nonprofits is considered as rewarding to the firm as it is to the communities that its employees serve.

Commonly, workplace wellness first brings physical health to mind. Brownstein addresses this aspect of wellness by offering its employees gym membership reimbursement with incentives tied to usage, in order to encourage regular gym visits. Using an online wellness portal, the firm also incorporates individual and team challenges, providing alternative approaches to promoting more active lifestyles. The team challenges are popular in the firm, because not only do they enhance fitness, they also promote team-building and create a motivating and rewarding atmosphere with a greater level of accountability. The firm's wellness portal can also synch with employees' fitness devices for additional ease in tracking physical activity.

Brownstein's wellness portal, branded as the "Strive to Inspire Program" (Strive), also features challenges that tie into mental, emotional and financial well-being as well as environmental and community involvement. As each challenge is completed, points tied to cash incentives are awarded. Several challenges involve prevention efforts; points are awarded for getting annual physicals, dental exams, biometrics and declarations of a tobacco-free status. With healthcare costs on the rise, prevention is a major consideration for employers and can easily be incorporated into wellness programs.

The highest level in the firm's program is called "Inspire & Pay It Forward." An individual who achieves this level receives a discount on his or her group medical coverage the following year. Employees who reach this level are also entered into a drawing,

the winner of which receives a \$1,000 cash prize plus a matching donation to the charity of his or her choice. An employee in the Las Vegas office was the 2017 winner; she chose the American Diabetes Association for her matching donation.

Studies have shown that volunteerism has a positive impact on the health and well-being of those who participate. The "Doing Good is Good for You Study," produced by UnitedHealthcare and VolunteerMatch, found that 75 percent of U.S. adults polled feel physically and emotionally healthier due to volunteering; 88 percent experience a boost in self-esteem by giving back; and 93 percent reported an improved mood. Volunteers are also significantly more likely to feel a greater sense of control over their health and well-being than those who do not volunteer.

For these reasons, Brownstein makes volunteer work a vital part of its wellness program. The firm's employees have contributed to the success of its community relations program, of which volunteerism is a key component. Approximately 70 percent of Brownstein's attorneys, including almost 90 percent of the shareholders in its Nevada offices, sit on charitable boards, and nearly all participate in activities that support local nonprofit organizations and other charitable and community endeavors. In addition to the firm's significant charitable donations (of both time and resources), the firm awards "Strive" points to employees who participate in community events.

Throughout the year, the firm encourages its attorneys, staff, employees' family members and the firm's clients to get involved with their communities by volunteering and participating in "Karma" projects. Karma projects are planned and led by Brownstein employees who serve on Karma Committees in each of the firm's offices. Last year, more than 400 Brownstein volunteers provided over 1,400 hours of volunteer service. This year, the firm is planning to complete at least 50 Karma projects in honor of the firm's 50th Anniversary.

One recent Las Vegas Karma project has Brownstein partnering with Green Our Planet, in an ongoing initiative to create and maintain an outdoor garden classroom program at Halle Hewetson Elementary School (a school adopted by Brownstein's Las Vegas office). Since teaming up with Green Our Planet, Brownstein team members have spent a number of weekends painting murals and constructing outdoor seating, vegetable gardens, two outdoor classrooms, a harvesting table and a commercial grade composter. After completing the classroom build, the project culminated with a student-run farmers' market in downtown Las Vegas. Students from the elementary school sold the produce they grew in their outdoor classroom to local shoppers, generating money to be re-invested in the school's garden program.

Statistics from the Society for Human Resource Management show that 62 percent of employers provide wellness tips to their

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employees at least quarterly. Brownstein distributes a monthly newsletter that has a 75 percent open rate among the firm’s employees. The newsletter focuses on topics that are especially relevant to those in the industry, including sleep, stress and substance abuse. Its goal is to give employees concise information that ties into simple wellness solutions for busy professionals. It includes recommendations for apps that can be easily downloaded to support various wellness goals, and reminders of the wellness-related resources available to them. The Employee Assistance Program is mentioned in every newsletter.

Employee assistance programs are valuable in almost every organization, but are especially vital in the legal industry. This confidential resource, provided at no cost to employees, gives Brownstein’s employees the ability to seek assistance with issues that they may not feel comfortable raising with others at the firm or even within their own families. Brownstein’s program also extends this benefit to household members. The biggest challenge related to the program is ensuring that all employees know that it is available to them, that it won’t cost them anything to utilize it and to make sure they know how to access it. For this reason, the program is mentioned in every new-hire orientation, flyers are posted in every firm office and a firm-wide email explaining the program goes out

to employees several times each year, including times that can be especially stressful to many, such as the holiday season.

Bringing health and wellness to all aspects of life and offering presentations by speakers who can educate employees on common stressors and how to deal with them, is another key element of the firm’s wellness approach. Timing is key, so the presentations offered strive for relevance. In January, for example, when financial wellness is on the minds of many, the firm’s investment consulting partners host presentations on budgeting, including information about such topics as student loans. Since May is Mental Health Awareness Month, the firm sponsors a session concerning mental health issues. Certain Continuing Legal Education programs also tie in with wellness initiatives, and Brownstein’s Wellness Team works closely with the Brownstein Professional Development Team to bring them to fruition.

Everyone’s personal wellness journey is unique, including those of legal professionals who face tremendous stress. An open-door approach to wellness is the key to a program’s success. It is imperative that firms ask employees for suggestions and feedback at every opportunity—in monthly newsletters, before and after presentations and during new-hire orientations—because wellness initiatives should mirror employees’ wellness goals.

The program at Brownstein is fashioned as it is today because of the requests, input and feedback of its employees. Brownstein plans to continue to prioritize wellness and to enhance its program as it changes and grows organically, based on the desires of those within the firm and the needs of the communities it serves. It is hoped that wellness programs will continue to grow in popularity and scope throughout the legal community and businesses at large. **NL**

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