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Why Having a Happy Workforce Should be Part of Your Marketing Plan

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Special to the Legal

Let's say you had a choice: You needed to hire a law firm, and your choices were one where the staff was indifferent and unengaged, and the other was a law firm where the staff was happy, caring and involved. I know which one I would pick.

One of the great law firms I work with—Chester County-based MacElree Harvey—received the accolade recently of “Best Places to Work in Pennsylvania.” Based largely on employee feedback, the firm ranked first in Chester County of all businesses and sixth in the state in the competition judged by the Team Pennsylvania Foundation, the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, the Pennsylvania State Council of the Society for Human Resource Management, and the Central Penn Business Journal. The awards program, created in 2000, is



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one of the first statewide programs of its kind in the country. Of all the law firms who competed, the firm took top honors.

I think this is a very big achievement.

We know that the provision of outstanding client service is a differentiating factor among law firms today. I believe that happier employees go a long way toward making that level of service a reality. And, an investment in your employees has been shown to be correlated to higher revenues. According to a December 2017 article in *Forbes* by Camille Preston, Ph.D. “There is growing evidence that when one’s employees are happy, organizations thrive ... The stock prices

of *Fortune*’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” rose 14 percent from 1998-2005, while companies not on the list reported a 6 percent increase.”

These were MacElree Harvey’s findings as well. Each practice group in the firm saw increases in 2018 and overall revenue exceeded budgeted forecasts. The number of new matters the firm received was up. Turnover was at an all-time low—which is significant because it means clients get to really know the firm staff and feel a sense of bonding with the firm.

According to firm CEO, Michelle Foster, the firm earned its place in the top 100 list by paying conscious attention to employees’ well-being and taking a holistic firmwide approach to creating that kind of positive environment. “Our approach to workplace well-being is not complicated. It starts with a recognition that each person at MacElree Harvey has a valuable role to play in its success. We also recognize that the challenges in today’s professional environment cannot be met by a workplace whose

energy is diverted by complaining rather than engaging. From top to bottom, we all get evaluated by not just whether our work is technically proficient but also whether we help each other to grow and succeed as well. This necessitates creating a culture which breaks down barriers and encourages rather than discourages. It is really gratifying that this straightforward approach leads to the recognition that we have received from both inside and outside the firm.”

This was not serendipitous. The firm, under Foster’s tutelage, set in motion a series of programs that together created the working environment so recognized. Some instituted include:

- Terrific benefits including profit-sharing bonuses and a comprehensive benefits package that includes medical, dental and vision coverage, long-term disability insurance and tuition reimbursement.
- Employee recognition programs. The firm positively values people who work hard and they are celebrated. Group recognition is provided regularly to recognize and reward group activity with gifts/certificates presented by leadership. For Administrative Professionals Week, the firm provides flowers and gifts and luncheons to all staff and administration. Individual spot recognition is done regularly to recognize and reward excellent performance. This includes leadership giving individualized and customized gifts and verbal recognition to the employees.

Employees receive service awards (5, 10, 15, 20, 25, etc.), with customized plaques and trophies engraved with their name and years of service presented in front of the entire firm by leadership.

- Providing special attention to career development, with opportunities for mentoring, cross-training and participation in leadership workshops as well as support for leadership roles in volunteer organizations. In the

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community service realm, employees are given paid time off for volunteer work.

Regular social events such as happy hours, ice cream socials, picnics, a special culinary day and an annual Halloween party for employees and their families. During football season, the firm hosts pep rallies for Philadelphia Eagles games while wearing team attire.

- Workplace facilities to promote exercise and fitness and pays part of employees’ costs for health club memberships through Blue Cross or fitness or wellness programs. There is on-site personal development and

stress management workshops, seminars, financial education workshops and concierge services (such as dry cleaning). On-site health screenings (blood pressure, cholesterol, weight), flu shot clinics, weight watchers programs and on- and off-site team building activities are held.

- Every two weeks, the firm hosts “Goodie Day” with a wide variety of food and healthy snacks provided to employees.

- The inclusion of staff in meetings to discuss how service can be even more ratcheted up for clients. Their feedback is sought and valued.

MacElree Harvey continues to fine-tune its workplace programs, deciding recently to add more wellness programs (after-work yoga and tai chi), team-building exercises and donate more time to charity events. All of this is being done to ensure that clients work with uber-engaged lawyers and staff.

Your firm can do this too! MacElree Harvey has 37 lawyers—it is not a huge place, and yet they have woven having a great workplace into the fabric of the firm. Doing so makes sense, doesn’t cost a great deal and creates great results. Make a happy workplace part of your marketing strategy and you will reap the rewards. •