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## LEGAL MARKETING

# Want to Grow Revenues? How One Firm Did by Creating a Great Working Environment

BY STACY WEST CLARK

*Special to the Legal*

Here is a recommendation: Based on my 30 years' experience as an attorney and law firm marketing consultant, if I were to advise you on two most important things your law firm should do to help its marketing efforts and bottom line, I would recommend that it be: first, creating a fantastic work environment for an outstanding workforce and second, teaching, then mandating the provision of outstanding service to clients. Today, we focus on the former and a case study. (More to come in the coming months on the latter.)

The happier your lawyers and staff are coming to work; the better service and work product clients will receive. When this happens, clients keep coming back giving you more work because you do the work, get the desired result and the experience of working with you is wonderful. Why do you go back to your favorite restaurant time and time again? I'm sure you love the food but something important about the experience must be fantastic as well. Right?

Every single person who works for you is an ambassador of the firm on the street—representing the professionalism, excellent work product



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and outstanding service you provide. Therefore, smart law firms of all sizes have a deliberate strategic hand in insuring that their people—lawyers and staff—are happy—and we will focus on one today.

MacElree Harvey has 40 lawyers and 52 staff members in four offices in Pennsylvania and Delaware. The largest office is in West Chester

This year, for the fourth in a row—and the second during the COVID-19 pandemic—the firm received the coveted “Best Places to Work in Pennsylvania Top 100” award (BPTW) and saw revenues increase while expenses decreased to ensure a healthy profit.

I think I should repeat that—the firm saw increased revenue across all its practice areas. This was not serendipity. A plan was in place and your firm can do it too.

The firm's chief executive officer, Michelle Foster, recently gave me a

blueprint for how MacElree Harvey stayed profitable during the pandemic in 2020, brought back laid-off employees, added new employees and even added an office and lawyers in Delaware, grew revenues and won this award.

What did they do?

Let's talk about the award first.

Winning the state's “Best Places to Work” for the fourth-straight year—and being the only law firm recognized—is nothing to sneeze at, especially when you consider that the award is totally based on employee feedback. A formula, like the one used by Fortune to select its “100 Best Companies to Work For,” is used to select the winners. Employees must answer questions on the survey about: training and development; role satisfaction, corporate culture and communication, leadership, pay and benefits, work environment and more. The award is sponsored in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

Now, look at the things MacElree Harvey did for their attorneys and staff during COVID to maintain a happy and highly content workforce:

- Employees' salaries were reduced for one pay period, however the amount reduced was given at year

end. This was in addition to three other bonuses and salary increases. The 401(k) safe harbor contribution and the HSA firm paid deductible programs were kept in place.

- Deliberately, the firm brought everyone back to work in the office in June 2020 safely and effectively following all CDC protocols. This meant that lawyers and staff were only remote for three months.

- Foster was on site every day when the office first reopened in June, with an open-door policy for lawyers and staff to come in and air their concerns, anxieties and address their questions.

- Once in the office, CDC protocols were strictly in place and guidelines were communicated. Everyone wore masks—97% of the firm got fully vaccinated and to date, there have been no COVID outbreaks or office closures.

- The decision to come back as soon as possible to in-person work was based on a combination of outside empirical research and the existing culture of the firm. Remember, they had won the Best Places to Work Award for three consecutive years. The social aspect of working at the firm had always been huge to all lawyers and staff in the past. They had witnessed first-hand how time together in the office had deepened collaborative relationships with colleagues and friendships. Thus, they knew that time apart could certainly affect job performance.

- Returning to in-person work quickly helped resolve any attorney self-confidence issues that arose from the stay-at-home mandate. The ability to remain confident and continue client development opportunities ultimately helped the attorneys grow their business.

- Attorney 1-1 mentoring programs remained in place and vibrant contributing to outstanding work product and client service—both which the firm believed had a direct effect on the number of new matters that came in over the last 18 months. Camaraderie and friendship among the attorneys were always recognized as a key element of the firm’s grooming of the next generation of partners and leaders in the firm. Lateral

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recruiting also kept going to find the right lawyers to grow the firm—ergo the merger in Delaware.

- The firm deliberately put into place programs to keep employees engaged virtually and in person—including:

1. Virtual meditation.
2. Mindfulness courses.
3. Multiple outside events in the parking lot including an ice cream truck and social, corn-hole tournament, hot dogs and food for opening day of Phillies baseball (cutely titled “Swing BY”) and more.
4. The firm continued to offer a “summer flex program” whereby staff could elect to leave one hour early on Fridays in the summer.
5. Tuition reimbursement programs also remained in place.

- The firm continued all aspects of its existing intensive “client service initiative” during the pandemic. Team meetings kept occurring with staff and lawyers, as in the past, to brainstorm on how to improve client service. Virtual “client interviews” were held with clients whose matters had recently concluded to assess their satisfaction with the firm’s services.

- The firm gave its first-ever mid-year bonus in June 2021 to all employees as a token of its appreciation for the staff’s “loyalty and dedication.” Read the notice from Foster of the bonus: “Our loyal employees are a significant part of our team and we couldn’t imagine our firm without you. ... We thank all of you for staying with us for the years and days to come.”

To summarize, here is the equation that worked and continues to work for MacElree Harvey:

- Hire great people.
- Deliberately create a wonderful work environment.
- Provide outstanding legal work and service to clients.

The result: growth in revenues during a pandemic (and beyond).

Your firm can do this too. If you want help, let me know, otherwise, know I’m rooting for you and would like to tell your firm’s story in an upcoming column. •