

Client: Hogan Lovells
Source: The Lawyer (Main)
Date: 02 July 2017
Page: 22
Reach: 20899
Size: 1093cm2
Value: 7279.38

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Management toolkit Staff wellbeing



... offer a wellness programme?

Working in the legal profession is demanding, but offering bespoke wellbeing support can boost staff morale and make for a happier workplace

By Richard Simmons

There have been many calls to tackle the problem of stress, anxiety and depression in the legal profession. To their credit, firms are more aware of the issues and many are taking steps to promote mental health among their employees. Yet it takes time to change. *The Lawyer's* own stress survey of 2014 found just 17 per cent of respondents were aware of initiatives within their firm to help employees manage stress. A further 28 per cent were not sure whether their firm had policies in place, while 55 per cent said their firm had no stress-busting initiatives.

So Hogan Lovells bringing in on-site psychologists for its New York and Washington DC offices is a relatively novel move. It is part of a larger 'wellness' programme, which the firm started in London in 2014 and then rolled out to New York and Washington DC in 2016. Over the next year, Hogan Lovells expect to extend it to other offices in the US and Continental Europe.

Why would you?

"The motivation behind the wellness programme was 100 per cent to support employees, not to make them more productive," says managing partner at Hogan Lovells' New York office, Oliver Armas. "We made a candid assessment of our profession: it is very demanding; our firm attracts high profile and complex legal matters; our clients expect the most of us; our employees have to work long hours. Then there are the everyday complexities of life: a long commute; family obligations; the lack of time to run errands and things like that. With this being our reality, we formed a wellness committee." This includes partners, associates and non legal staff who come together to discuss what it is the firm can do to address those issues, with the goal of promoting a healthy lifestyle and improving morale.

How would you?

That led to the development of a bespoke programme through the firm's insurance company and the introduction of Dr Joel Becker, a certified neuropsychologist. Dr Becker comes into the New York office once or twice a week (Dr George does the honours in DC).

"We have a private area in the office and we don't monitor who comes or goes, but we encourage everyone to go," says Armas. "We think it's a good thing to talk to Dr Becker."

Dr Becker is also available by phone when he is not physically in the office.

For himself, Dr Becker, who deals with professionals in other high-pressure jobs including physicians and airline pilots, says: "The stereotype of the attorney is that they are a very analytical and rational figure; however I have found that, once you establish a good rapport with them, the attorney client can be completely in touch with their emotions."

If the doctor spots a trend or something he believes is a broader systemic issue or problem, he is instructed, while maintaining confidence, to bring it to the firm's attention so it can develop a protocol and nip it in the bud ("joyfully, that hasn't occurred," says Armas). The rest is between him and his patients.

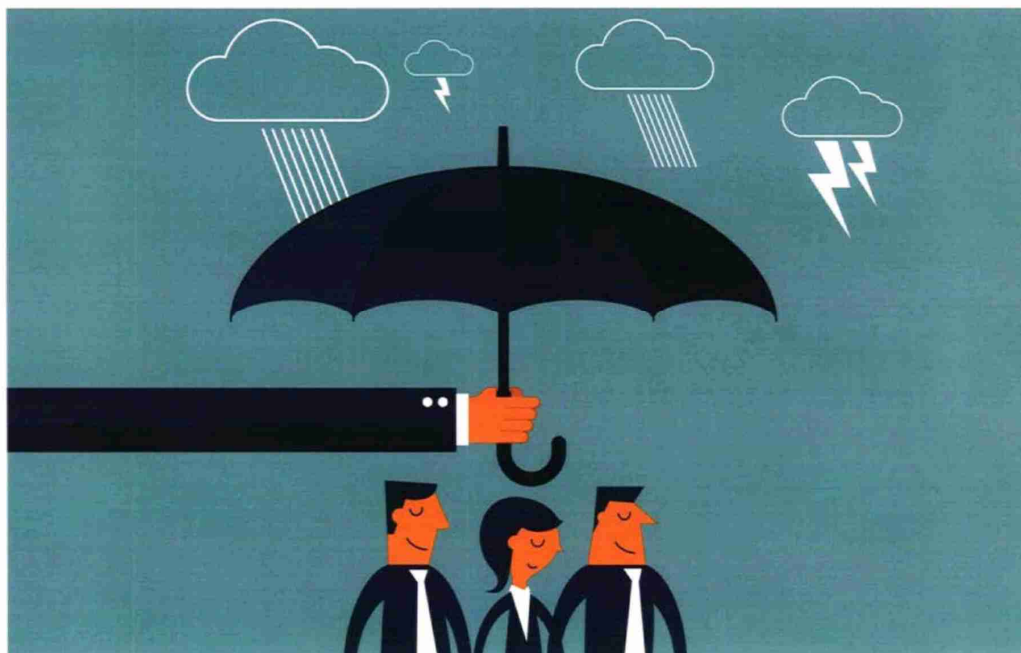
The firm hasn't conducted an empirical analysis to see if there has been a boost in staff morale or productivity yet. "We probably will in future," says Armas, "but the aim wasn't to improve productivity – though if that happens as a by-product, that's great."

"Anecdotally, I can tell you I see more smiles around the office than I have ever seen and that goes a long way towards my happiness." ●



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LESSONS LEARNED

► **Remove the stigma**

If you bring in a doctor, you should want to shout about it from the rooftops and treat it like it's normal, not as something secretive or that shouldn't be talked about. "We have been loud and proud: we are not ashamed to be offering it," says Armas. The world won't think you have crazy lawyers. "This is not about craziness, this is about physical and mental wellness: you shouldn't use the word 'crazy' or concepts like that."

► **Create a private area**

"You want to create an environment in which people feel just as comfortable saying, 'I'm going to be away from my desk seeing Dr Joel for half an hour' as saying 'I'm going to run to get a coffee at Starbucks,'" says Armas. Having a space that is secure and confidential is key to making people feel safe.

► **Be generous**

"These are typically expensive programs to run, but I can't think of a better way to spend our money," explains Armas. You will want to make sure you hire doctors who can relate well to lawyers, and are aware of the pressures that exist in law firms. There are all kinds of therapists, and hiring those who are aware of the practical realities of the legal profession will go a long way towards ensuring the sessions are as meaningful as possible. "We went out of our way to ensure the people we engaged had high credentials. That meant it was a more expensive program, and that's fine by us," Armas states.