

An Unexpected Road to Profits: Corporate Health and Wellness

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By **Ioana Good** | February 08, 2021 at 11:00 AM



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There is no doubt that our world went through some rapid changes in 2020 and while we all faced some challenging times, we adapted and brought new initiatives forward like health and wellness, flexibility, enhanced technology, clear internal communication, and tighter security. According to Deloitte's 2021 Global Marketing Trends Study, where 2,447 global consumers and 405 C-suite executives from global companies were surveyed, 79% of the responders recalled brands that positively responded to the pandemic to help customers, workforces, and

communities forge ahead. The study found that many companies aligned their brand identity with their sustained commitment to stakeholders, employees, suppliers, and communities by adapting their long-standing policies to the crisis at hand. Survey participants mostly recognized brands that responded positively to the coronavirus pandemic based on their investment in the health and wellness of their employees and donations to support community efforts to help those in need.

Ball Janik LLP, a firm with coast-to-coast offices, shifted to a work-from-home model overnight and continuously checked in on its employees and clients. While the firm had their technology and continuity plans in place to keep the firm operational in a disaster prior to the pandemic, the firm implemented new solutions centered around mental health, security, productivity and performance no matter where their employees are located. “It was important to us to make our employees comfortable, so we did our best to mimic their work environments by sending chairs, floor mats, standing desks and extra monitors to those employees who needed them,” said Heather J. Oden, the firm’s Chief Operating Officer. The firm’s marketing team was largely instrumental in successfully digitalizing their offerings, drafting internal and external communications to keep employees and clients up to date. Additionally, the firm shifted their budget immediately to focus on digital efforts and wellness initiatives to protect the well-being of its employees and clients.

“We owe much of our success to our employees,” says Oden. “During this time of change, we remain close by, communicating often and staying involved in one another’s lives. We also placed a greater emphasis on mental health and well-being by offering expanded mental health services through our provider. Additionally, we have a robust Women’s Leadership Initiative that meets regularly and helps our female employees to support one another.”

Knowing that stress is dangerously high in the legal profession, Lowndes decided to address the well-being of its employees prior to the pandemic. “The signs have been all around us for some time, said Susanne Mandel, the firm’s CMO. “Articles, talk shows, statistics, celebrity and

public service announcements have opened discussions about mental health and the national crisis spurred the renewed attention to our overall health and well-being.”

Mandel points out that the physical health of the population in general has steadily declined over the past decade and the pandemic added more urgency to an already serious problem.

“It’s bad enough that in 1989 only 15% of Americans engaged in regular physical activity, healthy eating, didn’t drink or smoke excessively, and maintained a healthy weight,” said Mandel, reciting stats from the Journal of American Medicine. “In 2009, that percentage dropped to 8% and in 2019 – before the onset of the pandemic – that percentage hit a low of 4%.” With such statistics in mind, Lowndes researched and conferred with community health care experts and other businesses to study wellness programs and eventually teamed up with Virgin Pulse, the world’s #1 well-being provider, to offer Lowndes Life, a virtual program to help all employees of the firm make healthy choices, be well together, and be inspired to live better every day. Lowndes Life is available to all employees and includes quarterly and annual incentives for tasks undertaken and milestones achieved. The firm is also renovating its space to include yoga, exercise equipment and mindfulness programs.

“We were ‘gung-ho’ prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, so the Lowndes Life program has served as another way for us to connect and support each other, and continue our efforts toward a better Lowndes Life,” said Mandel.

Tracy LaLonde, founder of Joychiever, a company that focuses on helping overachievers find joy to live healthier and more productive lives could not agree more. LaLonde says that achievement and joy do not have to be mutually exclusive. During the 2020 pandemic, individuals have had more time to enjoy and take control of their lives, ironically during a time where the environment could not be controlled. By making intentional choices for joy, the legal community has become more productive and, in many cases, healthier. Still a lot of work lies ahead. In December 2020, the Institute for Well Being in Law (IWIL) was formed to carry on the movement launched by the National Task Force Group. The organization is dedicated to

improving the legal profession by focusing on well-being through advocacy, research, education, technical and resource support and stakeholders' partnerships. Law firms are now able to sign the ABA Well- Being Pledge which recognizes substance use and mental health problems in the legal space and acknowledges a commitment to do more.

Dykema is one of the firms that signed the pledge in 2019 and Morgan Smith, the firm's Professional Development Director says the firm created an advisory group to provide resources and programming for its employees. For example, the firm created a monthly newsletter outlining wellness initiatives and recommendations for physical fitness, guided meditation, managing stress and setting healthy goals. The firm is also gearing up for well-being week in May 2021.

"Mindfulness is something we have committed to with recommendations and workshops for employees," says Smith. The firm's wellness group hosts some fun and competitive challenges. For instance, in 2020 the firm encouraged employees in each office to track their steps and share results with one another. This year, the firm will host a virtual bicycling competition by encouraging employees to use their bicycles – whether outdoor or stationary - to track their mileage. "We encourage bragging rights to recognize the winners and we have noticed folks have gotten to know each other even better across the firm." As an incentive, prizes like gift cards, water bottles and gym bags are provided for employees. The firm also started a wellness book club which meets virtually. "Really, our goal is to encourage everyone to stop and think about wellness in addition to managing the demands of work," said Smith. "While we are living through strange times, we are becoming more connected."

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