

Lawyer Well-Being Pledge and Awards

Motivating Legal Employers to Discuss, Embrace, and Promote Positive Change

By TRACI CIPRIANO

A MAJOR CULTURE SHIFT IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION IS LONG OVERDUE and the COVID-19 pandemic has only further reinforced this need. In April 2021, the CBA Lawyer Well-Being Committee rolled out the annual CBA Well-Being Pledge. The goal of the pledge is to stimulate conversation around well-being issues, and help legal employers proactively promote change. The pledge is modeled after the ABA pledge, but expands on the latter's substance use focus to include more individual and organizational factors related to well-being. Each April, legal employers will be invited to commit (and re-commit) to as many—or few—aspects of the pledge as they believe they can reasonably implement in the coming year.

The Pledge Commitment form was designed with behavior change in mind. Signatories are instructed to commit to only those items which are reasonably believed to be attainable, no matter how few. In addition, signatories are asked to write out 2-3 objectives, or plans for how the pledged goals will be met. This process is intended to help employers think through what changes they want to make and the best way to go about it. In addition, signatories are asked to fill out a Pledge Progress form the following April, with which they rate (on a scale of 1-10) progress made toward the pledged items. For any goals not made, signatories are asked to write down any barriers to accomplishing their goals, with the intention of helping them to begin to think about what went wrong and what might be done differently in the coming year. Attorneys and staff working for each signatory employer are also invited to complete separate, *anony-*

mous Pledge Progress forms, again rating progress on goals, and highlighting any barriers. *The identity of respondents and law firms will be kept confidential.* The progress forms are intended to be used for future CBA Well-Being Awards.

The CBA Well-Being Pledge is just a starting point, a tool to stimulate thoughts and conversations about change within legal culture and cannot possibly address all aspects of well-being. Well-being is defined broadly in the pledge, encompassing both individual and organizational aspects needed to promote self-care and a healthy work environment. Self-care resources and strategies are key, such as in-house resources (*i.e.*, a meditation room, a lactation room, and/or a weekly yoga class) and educational opportunities addressing well-being, mental health, and substance use. At the same time, overall organizational culture is paramount.

For instance, if you designate a “meditation room” in your office, but attorneys and staff are not supported in taking the time to utilize it (or worse, stigmatized), this meditation room simply serves as a well-being mirage. Alternatively, if the meditation room (or another resource or policy) is embraced by your firm, attorneys may freely utilize it, but if they must be accessible nearly 24/7, or the firm work culture is toxic, these negative workplace forces will likely eventually lead to burnout despite a person's best efforts at self-care.



Image credit: Feodora Chiosear/Stock/Getty Images



KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE CBA WELL-BEING PLEDGE INCLUDE:

- What are the expectations around electronic communications outside of “normal” business hours?
- Do attorneys and staff utilize their vacation time?
- What do typical interactions among attorneys and staff look like?
- Are help-seeking and self-care consistently promoted and encouraged by your firm?

- What is your organizational culture around substance use? Is alcohol a “must have” for all extracurricular team-building activities?

These are a few of the questions your firm leaders might consider asking as you embark on workplace culture transformation.

Among other things, flexible work schedules, positive communication strategies, and access to quality mental health care with a robust provider network should be top priorities on every law firm’s list of goals.

To learn more about the CBA Lawyer Well-Being Pledge and future awards, you can access the CBA Lawyer Well-Being Committee Resources page at ctbar.org/LawyerWellBeingResources. ■

Traci Cipriano JD PhD is a member and past (2020-2021) co-chair of the CBA Lawyer Well-Being Committee. She provides consultation, training, and coaching, and is an assistant clinical professor in the Yale Department of Psychiatry. She is currently working on a new book addressing the multidimensional aspects of lawyer well-being.