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*Preventing “Lawyer Meltdown” and Creating Productive, Profitable and Enjoyable Law Practices*



## **Over 25 Ways to Motivate and Reward Employees**

*By Allison C. Shields, Esq.*

People are the true value of any law firm. A law firm’s biggest asset is its intellectual capital, which comes from its people. And quality of client service is directly linked to employee satisfaction. That, coupled with the high cost of turnover, makes retaining good employees a high priority.

In this difficult economy, everyone is looking for ways to make ends meet. You may not be in a position to set a precedent by giving employees a big raise or bonus this year. But you want to make sure that your best employees are motivated and happy, and you’d like to reward them for the good work they do. You may want to motivate some employees that you don’t think are performing to their full capacity and reward those behaviors that the firm wants to encourage. Hopefully some of these suggestions will help.

## Get employees involved

Get your employees get involved in your firm in a substantive way. This may be one of the best methods to motivate and retain good employees. Believe it or not, most employees want to do a good job – at least in the beginning.

Your employees want to feel that they're making a valuable contribution to the firm and the firm's clients. Make sure every employee of the firm knows that their role is important to the firm's goals and to what you do for clients on a daily basis. Let employees see how their jobs contribute to the overall mission of the firm and make sure that they know the outcome of projects or engagements they work on.

- If you have committees within the firm, include a cross-section of the firm's employees – professional and non-professional staff alike
- Seek feedback from employees, particularly with regard to new or more productive ways of accomplishing their jobs
- Introduce associates and staff to clients as part of the team, especially if those employees will answer phones or otherwise come into contact with clients on a regular basis
- Give trusted employees responsibility and accountability for determining how they will do their jobs. Let staff know what they need to do and when it needs to be done and let them figure out the how. Responsible employees are more engaged and more productive, and are willing to accept accountability for results, and they constantly seek out ways to improve
- Allow staff to get involved with marketing and business development efforts

## Improve your communication

- Be proactive - don't let gossip be the way your firm learns of new hires, new initiatives or changes
- Create many different lines of communication, both formal and informal, through emails, firm meetings, individual meetings, firm newsletters, etc.
- Studies have shown that an open, trusting environment fosters leadership. That kind of environment requires good communication

- Make sure that employees have interaction and time with supervisors, managers and partners.

### **Create a strategic compensation and promotion plan**

- Hire for energy and attitude, not for skill; skills can be taught, but attitude usually can't
- Improve evaluations: identify each individual's strengths and set goals that will allow employees to focus on those strengths
- Reward attorneys and staff that practice the firm's values on a daily basis
- Develop training and mentoring programs within your firm
- Reward employees who seek additional responsibility
- Create a plan with staff to allow them to acquire the necessary skills to do their jobs better or to improve and move up to a higher level - assign mentors, give in-house classes or training
- Offer to pay for employees to attend continuing legal education, seminars, etc.

### **Provide non-monetary rewards and recognition**

Everyone wants to be recognized for their efforts and feel as if they make a difference. It doesn't have to cost anything.

Recognize staff for efforts that are beyond the call of duty. Praise employees for a job well done, especially in front of others, including clients. Clients enjoy getting to know your staff and will be even more eager to work with employees that have received praise or awards in a firm newsletter or on a website.

- Demonstrate an interest in your staff as people by providing rewards tailored to their individual interests or strengths
- Write a personal note of praise or congratulations. A short note from a partner or boss letting an employee know that they've done a good job can go a long way
- Rewards do not have to have an intrinsic value – the idea of being recognized and having something to display can go a long way. Provide something with bragging rights, like a firm trophy of sorts.

- Create rewards that employees can give one another – provide opportunities for them to praise others
- Develop a specific award for major accomplishments and give it a name. Hand out the reward in a public way, for example, at the annual firm picnic or holiday party

## **Be creative with perks and benefits**

Although not all rewards need to have monetary value, some rewards can involve a gift or prize that, in the long run, doesn't cost the firm much financially, but will reap big rewards.

- Think about what hardships your staff is facing – are they working long hours? Provide them with cleaning services for a job well done. Arrange for dry cleaning. Give a new lawyer a gift certificate for a new suit as a reward for passing the bar exam. For a lawyer or other employee that must do a lot of driving for the firm, perhaps a GPS would be a good bonus.
- Gas can be an unwelcome expense – help employees out by getting a firm gas card and letting employees charge transportation costs to the firm. Give the card to employees to use for a month after an outstanding performance. Let employees telecommute, or provide flexible work schedules. Allow employees that live near one another to synchronize their schedules to carpool and save money on transportation costs.
- Provide 'points' for things you want to encourage that might not be directly related to the employee's job (for example, attending after hours events) – the person with the most points gets some kind of prize. Or give prizes for employees that have amassed a certain number of points within a specified period of time.
- Send a thank you note or flowers to the spouse or family of an employee that has put in extra hours on a particular project or matter. Include movie or sporting event tickets for a family to spend time together.

- Allow employees to take off on their birthdays
- New attorneys often don't have the money or time to get their diplomas framed; frame them for them as a gift after their first year at the firm
- Create an atmosphere that your employees are eager to be involved in. Small things can make a big difference – bring in breakfast once in a while and create an event out of it.
- Buy breakfast or pizza for the office after a successful matter
- Pay for bar memberships for lawyers that are active and participate on committees, etc.
- Take individual employees to lunch and listen to their feedback about the firm – or just get to know them as people, and don't talk 'shop'
- Consider providing technology that will help your employees do their jobs better – if you don't want to buy phones, tablet computers or laptops for employees, provide an allowance toward these items or pay for one months' worth of those expenses as a 'bonus'
- Buy staff members subscriptions to trade journals, magazines or newsletters – ask them to share what they learned with others in the office, and ask them how they will apply what they have learned.

Want some help developing compensation, recognition and reward plans at your firm? [Contact me](#) to find out how I can help.

### ***About the Author***

*Allison C. Shields, Esq., President of Legal Ease Consulting, Inc., is a former practicing attorney and law firm manager who helps law firms create more productive, profitable and enjoyable law practices by providing practice management and business development coaching and consulting. Contact her at [Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com](mailto:Allison@LegalEaseConsulting.com), visit her website at [www.LawyerMeltdown.com](http://www.LawyerMeltdown.com) or her blog, [www.LegalEaseConsulting.com](http://www.LegalEaseConsulting.com).*

