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# Bloomberg Law®

## INSIGHT: Our Communities, Ourselves—Getting Back What You Give

By Krista Logelin



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In a second of a series of Insights on employee wellness, Krista Logelin, director of employee well-being at Morgan Lewis, writes about the importance of community as one of five core dimensions of the ML Well program.

A few years ago, the Boston Globe contacted Morgan Lewis with an unusual request. The paper had recently published an article about a set of grandparents who suddenly found themselves in the unexpected position of raising their grandchildren following their removal from unsafe living conditions in their mother's home. Readers around the world responded to the compelling story with offers of financial support for the family. The Globe sought our assistance in properly handling the funds.

Our firm realized we possessed a unique ability to help, and Morgan Lewis partner Sara Wells agreed to represent the grandparents on a pro bono basis. "You'll never know what it means to us and the boys," said the grandmother who, before Sara's counsel, had no way of collecting or managing the donations. The grandparents and the two young brothers were not the only ones who benefited from Sara's involvement, however.

“Knowing that I was making such a difference in these boys’ lives by doing something not so different from what I do day in and day out gave me a spring in my step and made going to work even more meaningful,” said Sara. “You can take a few hours of your day and change somebody’s life. You’re doing it for the client but knowing you made such an impact on the lives of others is powerful.”



*Morgan Lewis lawyers and professional staff participating in the firm's annual Community Impact Week.*

More and more, companies recognize the power of philanthropy and its effects on both their own organization and the local community. Importantly, the science supports this notion of mutual benefit. A study by scholars at the University of California-San Diego and Harvard University shows that happiness is a network phenomenon. This longitudinal social network analysis of more than 12,000 people living in Framingham, Massachusetts, observed individual happiness levels over a span of 20 years.

The remarkable results demonstrated that while happiness is in part a function of individual experience and choice, the happiness levels of the people surrounding that individual also play a major role. In the study, people were more likely to be happy if their friends were happy, if their friends' friends were happy, and if their friends' friends' friends were happy. That adds up to three degrees of societal separation affecting an individual's happiness. Put simply, happiness is contagious.

Further, happy people tended to be situated in the middle of their society, meaning they had more connections to their surrounding community around them than did unhappy individuals. Therefore, while the individual is certainly a key component of the well-being equation, we know more macro influences also affect our ability to flourish.

### **‘Community’ Is a Core Dimension**

For these reasons, organizations play a vital role in a healthy society. Morgan Lewis appreciates our ability to enhance well-being in our communities. In fact, we designated “community” as one of the five core dimensions of our well-being program, ML Well.

Interlocking networks make up the structure within Morgan Lewis and our firm, in turn, exists as part of a larger global society. We recognize that people who actively give of themselves in small and large ways tend to be healthier and happier, and being a part of something larger than oneself pays dividends for everyone involved. Using our legal skillset, we look for ways to add value to those around us, including through our robust pro bono program.

Volunteer work offers another prime avenue for community connection. Last month, as it does every June, Morgan Lewis hosts a Community Impact Week during which we come together as a firm to celebrate and participate in more than 175 bono and community service events across our global offices. This year, the week’s theme of “Community Well-Being” emphasizes that supporting our communities provides an opportunity to be a part of something larger than ourselves—in ways both small and large—and adds to our ability to thrive as individuals and as a firm.

Through various volunteer activities, we aim to empower our colleagues to discover that we help ourselves by helping others. The science demonstrates that doing so provides an exceptionally good way to improve one’s own overall well-being. Volunteerism is connected to positive outcomes related to everything from blood pressure to depression to longevity. Serving the communities in which we practice constitutes a core Morgan Lewis value. Given the countless reasons to get involved in our pro bono and community service initiatives, the decision to make these areas a priority is a simple one.

Bottom line: we get well by doing good things. Each organization, like each individual, can contribute something unique to the surrounding community. Everyone wins when we identify and tap into those strengths, then leverage them towards giving back to society.

*This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. or its owners.*

### **Author Information**

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