

How Firms Can Fight Back Against The Great Resignation

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (January 21, 2022, 4:21 PM EST) -- Holistic approaches to well-being, engagement and inclusion are absolutely vital to law firms looking to retain their associates amid the "great resignation" that has accompanied the pandemic, according to panelists at the Institute for Well-Being In Law's virtual conference Friday.

Law firms need to stop thinking about promoting well-being, inclusion and employee engagement through the lens of siloed programs and instead think about them as business drivers that allow the firm to retain its talent and thrive, said one of the panelists, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP Chief Engagement Officer Amanda D. Smith.

"Our workforce is changing and this is what they expect from their employers," Smith said of a conscientiousness around matters of well-being.

A law firm can develop the most innovative well-being program with detailed data, strong infrastructure and good resources, but the lived experiences of the lawyers in the law firm may not match up with those programs if, for example, they work underneath someone with a management style characterized by a lack of respect, Smith said.

"The existence of the wellness program isn't going to keep them there," she said. "All of those programs are important. They're a necessity, but an insufficient response to what's happening."

Smith suggested that law firm leaders should stop viewing well-being efforts, management training and partner performance as standalone, siloed efforts or initiatives, and instead fully integrate them with the goal of retaining talent.

She said her firm strives to "embed" the concepts of mentoring in an inclusive way, giving good feedback and caring for the well-being of those they manage into the firm's culture. One way it does that is through upward reviews, in which associates write a review of the partner under whom they work, she said.

Good management styles can be taught and very few lawyers graduate law school with the knowledge of how to properly manage those under them in an inclusive and healthy manner, "but these are absolutely learnable skills," she said.

Another panelist, Stephanie Scharf, co-founder of The Red Bee Group, says she believes that creating an

environment that is conducive to wellness and thus retention is a question of leadership.

"It's leaders saying, we don't want to have a culture like this," she said.

For example, Scharf said, there are firms where partners emailing associates at 10 at night, or 9 a.m. on a Saturday morning would be par for the course and the associate would be expected to respond to that email.

"This putting out fires mentality – that causes burnout and there's no need for it. It's all avoidable," Scharf said.

--Editing by Alex Hubbard.

All Content © 2003-2022, Portfolio Media, Inc.