

Beyond Benefits: Lessons from Outside the A/E Industry

Look for talent everywhere and you will find it

A legal continuing education company puts brainstorming to good use.

When your firm needs fresh ideas— whether in the human resources department or on the front lines of business development— instead of always looking to the upper levels of management or the principals, how about opening the floor to everyone?

While at first blush it may seem like it invites chaos, one company has figured out how to put the old corporate saw of talent scouting and brainstorming into productive company-wide practices that give its employees a greater stake in idea-generation— and thus a greater sense of pride and ownership in the company.

Lawline.com (New York, NY), a 25-person company that provides online continuing education services to lawyers, was recently recognized by the **New York State Society for Human Resource Management** (NYSHRM) as one of the 40 Best Companies to Work for in New York. It will be honored with the award in April.

'Real world school'

"We realize our greatest asset at Lawline.com is our employees and there are many specific examples of how we show this," says Chief Operating Officer Frank Bastone.

Lawline.com makes it a policy to expose its employees to each department at the company. This allows them "to experience a full spectrum of our business development," Bastone says. "We encourage them to take greater initiative in areas where they excel, and in return we help them further nurture that talent with increasingly greater responsibilities.



Lawline.com's Blog Host and Producer Meredith Ganzman interviews Chief Operating Officer Frank Bastone (right) and Operations Manager Frank Furbacher.

"In essence," he says, "we become a 'real-world school' that emphasizes and fosters the process of learning within the company."

Bastone says Lawline.com's focus on increasing its employees' knowledge of the company from this perspective has made it a top place to work.

"We find that our employees develop a real vested interest in our company," he says. "The passion they portray for their work and the passion they develop in growing our company have a synergistic effect on their motivation. This passion becomes contagious, and the positive environment that results is why we feel we were voted for this award."

Cast a wide net for ideas

Lawline.com also makes it a point to mine that knowledge. Its HR department provides two ways that all employees can contribute ideas toward the growth of the company.

The first is called Innovation Days, Bastone says.

"During this meeting, we gather our entire staff and brainstorm ideas for new products, programs and innovations, utilizing a white board," he says. "There are no limits, boundaries, or scope to the brainstorming session."

Nor are there limits on who attends.

"Everyone, from our CEO to our newest intern, is given the opportunity to share and develop these ideas," Bastone says. "At the end, we review and decide on the ideas that can improve the company and can be put into actionable steps."

Exercise employees' options

While internal idea generation has had great results, the company's top brass is always on the lookout for new talent to add to the mix as well. It has found it in unexpected places. When

Lawline.com's president was exploring joining a gym for employees near the office, he was impressed with the corporate sales manager.

Lawline.com's president hired the gym's sales manager as a consultant to train employees in the company's daily 8 a.m. meetings, which were eventually expanded into a program for the entire company.

"Our daily 8 a.m. meeting program began for our customer service department, but received such positive feedback that employees from separate departments began attending as well," Bastone says.

"These meetings serve a multitude of purposes— from brainstorming and idea generation to motivational words and goal formations," he says. "The results of this have been tremendous. Employee productivity has increased dramatically and the energy afterward has instigated great camaraderie and enthusiasm."

And the consultant who started the whole idea? Three months later, the company hired him as full-time vice president of sales. ◀

Does your firm do something unique? Let us know. E-mail Craig MacCormack at cmaccormack@zweigwhite.com.