

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

THE HAPPY LAWYER

Among the several books we like at the Louisiana Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP), there is one that offers sage advice to all lawyers about quality of life in the practice of law — *The Happy Lawyer, Making a Good Life in the Law*, Oxford University Press, 2010. The book covers a lot of ground and it is a valuable resource in advancing one's well-being and satisfaction in the practice of law.

Per the book, in general, lawyers are decidedly less happy than members of the clergy, travel agents, architects, scientists, engineers, airline pilots, physicians, financial planners, detectives, repair persons, housekeepers and butlers. But, at least, lawyers are generally happier than gas station attendants and roofers.

To improve your happiness as lawyer, the book suggests you choose work that is interesting to you, is challenging and aligns with your values. It is equally important to balance work and rest, which we all know is hard to do in a busy law practice. It's also important to deepen workplace relationships because "social embeddedness is the single best predictor of happiness."

In addition to personal advice on increasing your individual happiness in the law, the book details "Ten Steps That Could Make Your Law Firm a Happier Workplace," as follows:

Promote Lawyer Autonomy. Control over work is a top indicator of lawyer happiness. Allowing associates greater freedom to choose cases and control them can result in immense payoffs in productivity, satisfaction and loyalty. The book suggests mentoring new lawyers with a deliberate eye toward establishing their autonomy.

Take Off the Billable Hours Straitjacket. Citing a "law student revolt" by recent graduates of elite law schools, young lawyers appear willing to accept lower income in exchange for an increase in happiness.

Provide Work-Life Balance. One of the hottest topics in law in the last five years is the push to promote well-being, life balance and moderation within a profession that is notorious for high levels of stress and workaholicism.

Encouraging a Positive Attitude. It is suggested that, as to new hires, the law firm culture should actively facilitate the new lawyer's transition from a passive "problem spotter" in law school to becoming a "problem solver" as a practicing attorney responsible for cases.

Valuing Employees. There is no standard model for lawyer compensation, but one thing holds true. Lawyers are happiest when they think their work has been valued fairly. Also, perhaps counterintuitively, some studies show an *inverse* correlation between law firm profits and job satisfaction levels. Relentlessly profit-driven firms often pay little regard to personal satisfaction, happiness and well-being.

Promoting Social Interaction. The "Rule of 150" is cited for the proposition that firms with more than 150 members have difficulty fostering genuine social relationships, loyalty and cohesion beyond compliance with rules and regulations. Paychecks are important, but people also seek and need attention and appreciation within genuine relationships.

Giving the Pro Bono Bonus. Those who provide pro bono legal services report a direct correlation between that form of giving back and their own satisfaction. Pro bono activities boost attorney morale. Attorneys gain a tremendous sense of personal meaning from representing people who are vulnerable and achieving some measure of justice for them.

Creating a Playful Workplace. Not surprisingly, it is a challenge for professional button-downed law firms to incorporate "playfulness" in the workplace. Law firms can't be as laid back as Google. But some firms now offer basketball

courts, rock climbing walls and family fun days of recreational activities and outings.

Design Law Offices to Promote Lawyer Happiness. Offices with windows make happier lawyers, as does a law firm layout that includes a large comfortable place for lawyers to gather and socialize. Also, lawyers should be encouraged to fill their offices with meaningful things from their own personal lives rather than ostentatious trappings to impress visitors.

Asking for Feedback. People value receiving and giving feedback to their firm. Anonymous feedback surveys can help management assess working conditions and "take the pulse" of lawyer happiness within their firm. In fact, merely asking for feedback and opinions provides a happiness boost.

The suggestions above only scratch the surface of the comprehensive advice provided in *The Happy Lawyer*, all of which is summed up in the book: "Don't keep postponing your happiness. You might just postpone it all the way to your graveyard."

Contact JLAP if you would like more information. JLAP offers comprehensive, professional wellness and clinical services to the profession. Whether recommending books, conducting CLEs to promote the importance of well-being and self-care, or confidentially saving the life of a lawyer suffering a mental health or addiction crisis, JLAP is your highly specialized resource for confidential, professional clinical support. Call JLAP at (985)778-0571; email jlap@louisianajlap.com; or visit the website at: www.louisianajlap.com.

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