

# How Law Firms Can Engage and Support Their Workforces During COVID-19

In this article, the author explores the ways in which law firms and other organizations can continue to promote physical health, mental well-being, and overall morale amongst their workforces despite the challenges posed by COVID-19.

By Nicole Kosoff

Over the past decade, the discussion of company culture and the role that organizations play in the well-being of their employees has become increasingly popular. Since 2010 alone, the frequency in which individuals searched the term “company culture” on Google has nearly doubled worldwide and, in 2004, the titles “Chief Heart Officer” and “Chief Happiness Officer” were born. More and more, organizations are offering mental and physical health benefits to their employees not only as a form of loyalty, but also as a way of increasing productivity, retaining existing talent, and competing to attract top talent.

This need to provide both physical and mental health opportunities has become ever more profound with the COVID-19 pandemic, which—between social distancing and a seemingly never-ending news cycle of layoffs, hospitalizations, and deaths—has stirred a significant level of fear, anger, sadness, and grief; however, add budget cuts and remove the element of a shared office space, and the ability for employers to engage and support their workforces becomes significantly more challenging.

In this article, we explore the ways in which law firms and other organizations can continue to promote physical health,

mental well-being, and overall morale amongst their workforces despite the challenges posed by COVID-19.

## Using Visual Mediums To Foster Connection

Humans are social creatures by nature. From an evolutionary standpoint, humans who did not have sufficient networks had a lesser chance of survival. While our environments have evolved and individuals are no longer as directly dependent on others for survival, our need for connection and interaction remains deep today, often playing a direct role in our mental health. This is why, for many, working from home may put mental health at risk. The removal of a physical office space threatens the opportunity for regular contact with co-workers, which can stir feelings of isolation, loneliness, and disconnection.

It is for this reason that, in order to support the mental well-being of our workforce, one of our priorities has been utilizing technology to ensure that our team members continue to see each other every day despite not working in a communal office space. Whether through a simple photo or a videoconference call—using visual mediums so that individuals continue to see co-workers daily can help maintain a sense of normalcy and sustain a key sense



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of connectedness, even if from a distance.

Some ways of promoting visual engagement through photos, for example, include:

- Asking employees for photos of daily work-from-home highlights that can be distributed in a firm newsletter.
- Hosting photo challenges in which employees are encouraged to send in selfies based on a theme—such as the Getty challenge, their favorite mugs, their pets, company swag, etc. These photos can be included in your newsletter, sent out in a



separate email, or strung together to create a video for distribution via your social channels (with permission from those featured, of course).

- Incorporating photos in any form of employee recognition, including birthdays, workiversaries, or holidays, such as Administrative Professionals Day. This might be as simple as including a photo of the employee whose birthday you are celebrating, for instance. Alternatively, this may involve pictures of other team members wishing an individual a happy birthday.

Some ways in which firms can utilize videoconferencing include

- Having weekly “team lunches” in which co-workers can connect with one another and socialize while eating lunch as they would if they were in the lunch room at work.
- Facilitating discussions based on particular topics (i.e., working from home with children, relationship challenges while quarantining, a new movie that’s

been released, a book, etc.) through which co-workers can connect over shared experiences or provide tips to one another based on their own trials and successes.

- Hosting game nights—such as trivia nights—as a way not only for employees to connect with one another socially, but also as a way of creating some friendly and fun competition to provide some relief during a time that—for many—feels very heavy.

#### **Providing Fitness and Wellness Opportunities**

Fitness classes and wellness workshops are a fantastic way for organizations to not only promote physical fitness amongst their workforces, but also support their mental health, facilitate team bonding, and boost connectedness.

With tighter budgets and the inability to gather in a common space, it can be easy to assume that team fitness classes or wellness workshops are no longer an option; however, considering

the circumstances, many fitness and wellness instructors are willing to work within your budget and, with Zoom, it’s easy to convene as a group while still practicing social distancing.

Ideas for group fitness classes and wellness workshops through Zoom can include any of the following ideas and, depending on the preferences of each organization’s workforce, can be offered during the lunch hour, in the evenings, or even in the mornings work:

- A strength training workout ranging between 30 minutes-1 hour.
- An easy-flow yoga class with an emphasis on stretching and breathing.
- A light-paced Pilates class.
- A Zumba class, or any sort of dance class.
- A course on ergonomics educating individuals on how they can create an ergonomically optimal setup while working from home.
- A guided meditation with an anxiety coach or meditation instructor.

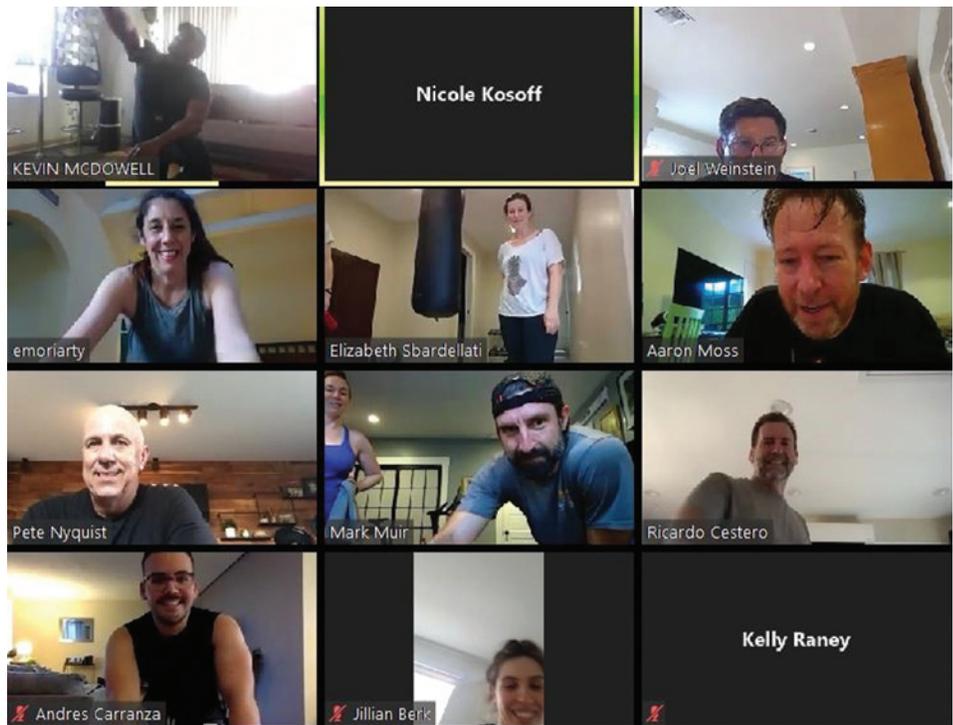
- A discussion facilitated by a relationships coach on how to navigate the challenges of relationships while quarantining or how to communicate boundaries more effectively.

If there is no room in the budget for fitness or wellness, there are also a variety of ways that companies can support their employees for free. Ideas for free fitness and wellness opportunities can include:

- Playing a fitness or wellness YouTube tutorial and sharing your screen via Zoom so that others may follow along.
- Playing a guided Headspace meditation for others to listen to and follow along.
- Listing a variety of popular fitness and wellness YouTubers in the company newsletter so that employees may explore opportunities individually on their own time.
- Sharing helpful research or tools related to health, such as foods that are naturally anti-viral, for team members to learn from and apply in their own lives.
- Creating wellness challenges that encourage employees to make lifestyle changes through healthy competition. An example of this is Nutrition Bingo, in which healthy foods (i.e., asparagus) or food challenges (i.e., go gluten-free for one day) are listed in a Bingo chart.

#### Hosting Challenges and Scheduling Game Nights

Inciting fun and friendly competition is a great way of not only bringing people together and encouraging team bonding, but also of sparking joy, laughter, and overall relief. If the challenge, game night, and/or prizes can at all fit the theme of quarantining, this can have benefits too, bringing a sense of creativity and light-hearted fun to a time that might otherwise feel heavy.



For example, as a challenge, we hosted Quarantine Bingo, in which our employees had a week to get five in a row, after which they would be entered into a raffle to receive a box of snacks from Snack Nation. While some Bingo boxes were more wellness-based (i.e., wash your hands for 20 seconds), others were more light-hearted and specific to the unique aspects of quarantining (i.e., finished a Netflix series, forgot what day of the week it was, started a project you've been meaning to work on).

Other challenges or game nights may include:

- Trivia nights over Zoom.
- Scavenger hunts over Zoom, in which the host asks for items (i.e., toilet paper, hand sanitizer, etc.), and individuals must find the requested items and make it back to the computer within a certain time frame.
- Pictionary over Zoom, in which individuals are split up into two teams and must guess the pictures that their teammates are drawing.

- Quarantine Olympics, in which individuals are separated into teams and must compete in quarantine-related challenges.

Prize ideas specific to quarantining may include:

- A snack box from Snack Nation
- Toilet paper
- Hand sanitizer
- A quarantine care package
- An Amazon, Instacart or Postmates gift card

#### Upholding Routine To Maintain Normalcy

To put it simply, humans like routine. With routine comes a feeling of comfort associated with familiarity and, ultimately, a feeling of safety. Studies have shown time and time again that creating and following a routine has psychological benefits, including improving mental health and promoting better sleep cycles.

With this in mind, it is important that—in the midst of the disruption that COVID-19 has caused—organizations maintain a sense of normalcy by doing their best to

carry out the customs and traditions that were in place prior to the work-from-home shift. This may look work-related, such as hosting department meetings at the same days and times as well as at the same frequency. Alternatively, this may be more culture-related, such as continuing to shout-out employees on the day of their workiversary or—at Greenberg Glusker—continuing to host our monthly “Oh Baby Challenge,” in which employees are challenged to guess which baby pictures belong to which employees celebrating birthdays that month.

### **Continuing To Recognize and Celebrate Employees**

Whether it’s spotlighting an employee who is celebrating a birthday, thanking an employee who has hit another year with the firm, or sending a shout-out to an employee whose work went above and beyond, continuing to recognize employees for their milestones and their contributions is crucial to fostering a sense of connectedness and maintaining a high level of company morale.

Not only does it communicate to employees that their employer recognizes and appreciates them on an individual level—making them feel seen and supported—but it also prompts other team members to reach out to that person and congratulate them, demonstrating to employees that they have a support network beyond immediate family and friends.

### **Being Transparent and Modeling Open Communication**

At this moment in time, there is a substantial amount of fear around the potential of pay cuts, furloughs, and layoffs. Between learning that friends or family have lost their jobs, seeing colleagues post on LinkedIn that they are newly in search of employment, and hearing the growing unemployment numbers in the news, the topic and accompanying anxiety can feel inescapable.

To minimize anxiety where possible, it is key that those in management positions provide updates on their firm’s well-being, possible outcomes, any furloughs that do take place (if any), and what steps the firm is taking to prevent the possibility of furloughs. This can be challenging, as this pandemic and its effects are ever-evolving. That said, showing transparency and demonstrating open communication nurtures a sense of trust while minimizing feelings of insecurity and anxiety that silence often creates.

### **Sharing Good News**

In general, news stations have been criticized for their role in contributing to stress, anxiety, and depression. Dr. Graham Davey, who specializes in the psychological effects of media violence, explains that, “Negative news can significantly change an individual’s mood—especially if there is a tendency in the news broadcasts to emphasize suffering and also the emotional components of the story.” By viewing negative news, he explains, “You’re likely to see your own personal worries as more threatening and severe” as well as “more likely to find your worry difficult to control and more distressing than it would normally be.”

A study conducted at the University of East London by positive psychology researcher Jodie Jackson found that positive news, on the other hand, had the following effects:

- Increased hope and optimism that, in turn, made news consumers more likely to notice positivity and become more solutions-oriented, creating a positive feedback loop.
- Increased levels of “active coping,” or being able to approach and engage with a problem rather than avoiding it.
- Improved sense of admiration for other people while also boosting self-efficacy, a person’s belief in their own ability to make a difference.

During this time in which individuals are flooded with statistics or stories of unemployment, hospitalizations, and even deaths, it is crucial to remind team members of the good news—the inspiring ways in which humans are coming together and using their areas of expertise as well as their resources to provide for and take care of one another during this time. It is recommended that this is done sensitively, as it is important not to undermine the severity of the current situation. But by featuring the light amongst the darkness, whether as a section of the firm newsletter or in a blog, law firms and other organizations can help encourage optimism as well as positivity while contributing to a more balanced outlook.

### **Collecting Feedback**

Using tools, like SurveyMonkey, to collect employee feedback is a key component to organizations successfully supporting their team members. By offering surveys, companies learn directly from employees what their experiences, interests, and availabilities are, helping to make events and programs more successful. More than that, by offering surveys, companies make employees feel heard and supported, communicating to them that their feedback is valued.

***Nicole Kosoff** is Greenberg Glusker’s employee engagement coordinator. Her expertise focuses on boosting company morale and increasing workplace happiness by promoting employee recognition, hosting fitness and wellness opportunities, fostering connections amongst employees, and collecting and implementing feedback. By supporting this programming and prioritizing employee engagement, Greenberg Glusker continues to demonstrate its long-standing commitment to supporting the well-being of its workforce.*