

Maximizing productivity and happiness among your lawyers

BY JEROME SHORE
For Law Times

If you manage lawyers, you're probably concerned about their productivity. It's usually thought of as a combination of output and efficiency supported by wellness, peace of mind, and engagement in the work. But quite often in the pressure cooker of law, there isn't enough time or energy to tend to your flock and, in your leadership role, you're looking for new ideas. It's likely you learned little, if anything, about that in law school.

To come up with some real-world and tested techniques, I asked a number of lawyers who manage others for their wisdom. Many comments correlated to an employee engagement strategy developed by David Rock, author of *Your Brain at Work*. He calls it the SCARF model, which suggests managers use five broad strategies (status, certainty, autonomy, relationships, and fairness) to build wellness and engagement and, therefore, productivity. First, build up the status of employees; second, communicate a lot to generate certainty; third, delegate enough to gain the advantages of autonomy; fourth, promote interaction to foster collaborative relationships; and fifth, ensure that people feel they are being treated fairly.

Building feelings of status among lawyers who work for you will help them feel good about themselves, and they will want more of that. It comes from noticing their high-quality efforts and recognition as easy to give as a simple compliment. James Howie, a founding partner of Howie Sacks & Henry LLP, puts it this way: "Associates and partners are encouraged to focus on quality of work, things that are productive and helpful. We downplay hours put in. Work product that is high quality is rewarded more than hours docketed."

McCarthy Tétrault LLP partner Bill McCullough articulates it this way: "I look for opportunities to compliment associates on their writing," he says. "It seems to build their self-esteem and mental energy."

Certainty is the notion of knowing what's going on. When people are uncertain, they can be a little insecure. Howard Sloan, president of the management committee at Goldman Sloan Nash & Haber LLP, has his own way of dealing with the issue. "When a lawyer who works for me is facing extraordinary stress,

I try to reach out in a way that will let them know they're important and valued," he says. "That pumps them up and builds loyalty."

Jay Swartz, a partner at Davies Ward Phillips & Vineberg LLP, has another suggestion. "When you give people responsibility and let them know that the team depends on them, they will generally rise to the occasion and perform without undue amounts of supervision," he says.

Autonomy is the feeling that you're managing yourself and your work. It's the feeling of being in control. For David Rosenberg, general counsel at Carillion Canada Inc., "it's all about permission to take charge. So delegation includes permission to take initiative, to learn by doing, to think outside the box, and even sometimes to risk making mistakes."

Relationships in the workplace deliver the many benefits of collaboration. Mary Vallee of Graham Partners LLP in Barrie, Ont., describes the advantages of a mentoring relationship like this: "Firstly, it decreases stress as the associate is given direction to proceed and doesn't have to worry if she is taking the right step. Secondly, it increases the interaction between senior and junior lawyers and builds collegiality. Associates then feel more comfortable asking questions."

The last element of the SCARF model is fairness. Essentially, people want appropriate reciprocity at work. They want to earn both money and recognition commensurate with what they put in. Rhonda Cohen, managing director at Sherrard Kuzz LLP, identifies two key strategies for achieving fairness. "First, we lead by example in accepting and acknowledging a range of models of what constitutes a successful lawyer," she says. "Second, we bonus on four equally weighted criteria: quality, teamwork, community outreach, and hours. In this way, we hope to develop a whole and happy lawyer, not just a billable-hours machine."

So while you may often feel that you're swimming upstream while managing lawyers, there's certainly no shortage of good ideas you can implement, quite often with something as simple as a kind word at a critical moment. **LI**



Speaker's Corner

Jerome Shore is the managing partner of The Coaching Clinic. You can reach him at 416-787-5555 or coach@coachingclinic.com.