

# MOTIVATING THE



BY JULIANA B. BERRY

# MASSES

Successful law firms have established a variety of initiatives and programs to inspire their attorneys and staffs and bolster their bottom lines.

## SHORTCUT

How do successful firms motivate their legal professionals to stay energized and engaged on the job? Leaders at three prominent law firms – Arnold & Porter LLP, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, and Baker & McKenzie – share some of their strategies and how they are driving overall business excellence.

In modern law firms, the topic of employee motivation is generating increased attention. Across all levels of firm leadership – from partners and associates to legal administrators and other managers – how the firm strives to motivate its staff is critical to its bottom-line success.

How do successful firms motivate their legal professionals to stay energized and engaged? Leaders at three prominent law firms – Arnold & Porter LLP, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, and Baker & McKenzie – shared some of their strategies with *Legal Management* and how those approaches are driving overall business excellence.

### PILLSBURY WINTHROP SHAW PITTMAN LLP

[www.pillsburylaw.com](http://www.pillsburylaw.com)

Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, which has more than 800 attorneys across 14 offices worldwide, considers employee welfare and morale a strategic priority. It's one of only four U.S. law firms on *Working Mother* magazine's 100 Best Companies list, which celebrates employers whose groundbreaking benefits – from flexible schedules and child care to innovative leave policies for new parents – are helping to redefine workplace standards.

By fostering team building, networking, and recreation through a variety of activities, the firm strives to keep employees happy, motivated, and energized. Among the events held so far this year:

- During the firm's annual Staff Appreciation Week in April, employees were treated to perks each day, from lunches at upscale eateries to daily prize drawings for spa visits, American Express gift cards, and concert tickets. Each employee also received a picnic set, including a blanket, flatware, napkins, and plates.
- In May, the firm's Washington, D.C., office arranged a private screening of "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End" for attorneys, staff, and their families. All enjoyed pre-show appetizers in Pillsbury's first-floor conference rooms, which had been turned into pirate-themed hangouts, complete with servers in costume.

- In July, the firm's McLean, Virginia, office staged a "Smooth Operator Challenge, during which attorneys made their favorite non-alcoholic smoothies as part of a friendly competition. Employees were encouraged to "buy" a full-size smoothie for \$5.00, which benefited the Medical Care for Children Partnership. The firm matched every dollar raised for the charity.
- Each office also holds an annual "Family Fun Day" at a popular amusement park or other fun venue.

Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP is also committed to employee health and wellness and the support of work/life balance. The firm's San Francisco office participates in Mayor Gavin Newsom's "Shape Up San Francisco" program, which involves many organizations citywide and emphasizes the importance of nutrition and physical activity to overall health. The firm's involvement complements its own comprehensive wellness program, which includes monthly seminars on topics such as nutrition, stress, time management, and exercise.

### ARNOLD & PORTER LLP

[www.arnoldporter.com](http://www.arnoldporter.com)

Arnold & Porter LLP, which has eight offices worldwide, is also one of only four U.S. law firms on *Working Mother's* 100 Best Companies list, as well as one of *FORTUNE* magazine's Top 100 Best Places to Work For®. The firm strives to stay true to its core values by providing a diverse workplace, a collegial work environment, and an unyielding commitment to inclusiveness.

Arnold & Porter continues to support policies and programs that motivate and educate attorneys and staff alike. Among the initiatives:

- The firm offers more than 150 in-house educational courses and unlimited access to several online and in-person external training vendors.
- In-house career development counselors work closely with associates to develop and track career plans.

- Associates participate in “real-world shadowing” and receive billable-equivalent hours. The program encourages associates to observe and learn from more experienced attorneys during activities such as hearings, trials, or client meetings.
- To assist attorneys in litigation-based practices in obtaining the trial experience needed to meet client needs, the firm created a training program designed to generate pro bono projects that will result in oral arguments, hearings, and trial work. A full-time trial counsel supervises the program.
- All lateral associates joining the firm participate in a three-part integration process. It includes an orientation program during the first days of employment to introduce them to the firm, their offices, and practice groups; a yearlong academic program that teaches the core skills new associates need as they start within their chosen areas of practice; and an annual, two-day retreat that focuses on the firm’s core values and facilitates dialogues with the firm’s management team.
- All associates from the firm’s offices are invited to a two-day training retreat in Washington, D.C., that focuses on leadership and management skills, client relations, and business development.
- Mentoring programs are in place for legal professionals throughout the firm, including new associates, laterals, junior associates, mid-level associates, and newly promoted partners.
- The firm’s “On-Ramp/Off Ramp Policy” allows an attorney to take an unpaid leave of absence of up to three years. During this time, the firm will assist the attorney to stay in good standing within the legal profession, underwrite the costs of bar memberships, support continued professional development and training, and encourage participants to stay connected to the firm through business development and social events.



## **BAKER & MCKENZIE**

*www.bakernet.com*

At Baker and McKenzie, which has more than 3,600 attorneys at 70 locations in 38 countries, keeping attorneys and staff interested in their work and loyal to the firm is a priority. The firm constantly strives to forge close personal relationships among its professionals to foster the responsiveness and accountability clients rightfully expect.

Among its notable initiatives and programs:

- A program launched by the firm’s Pro Bono Committee to support Habitat for Humanity has grown into a major event. During the firm’s annual “Take Your Child to Work Day,” participants are asked to draw pictures, which the firm frames and sells at an auction to benefit the charity.
- A partner on the Board of a Spanish-language institute has started Spanish classes, which are offered once a week during lunch hours. Partners, associates, and staff participate in these sessions for a nominal fee.
- The firm offers a sponsored child-care program through Bright Horizons. The program offers support to individuals during challenging times of balancing work and family needs, all at no cost to the employee.
- The firm offers regional meetings for associates, during which valuable information is shared about the firm, clients, and practices.
- This large, global firm gives aspiring and promising associates the opportunity to practice in other international locations through a special training program.

No matter the size of a law firm, making an investment and commitment to motivational strategies can create a better and more inclusive workplace. Learning and gaining knowledge of what works in other firms, what motivates your workforce, and developing a sense of emerging trends should facilitate an easier process of selecting proper ways of motivation in your office.

### *about the author*

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# An Appreciation Philosophy for Law Firms

BY NOELLE C. NELSON

*The Wall Street Journal* published an article earlier this year about a law firm that staunchly resisted the outgoing flow of associates by sending its partners to “charm school.” The partners learned the basics of appreciation, such as saying “please” and “thank you” and acknowledging associates in the hall. The result? Its above-normal 30 percent associate attrition rate dropped to about 22 percent – a laudable improvement. Bloggers quickly reacted with “Oh, come on – it’s common sense! Of course if you appreciate people, they’ll stick around longer,” as if appreciation was a no-brainer.

The truth, however, is that appreciation isn’t a no-brainer, for “please and thank you” represent but one small component of how to effectively value employees. Letting employees know they matter and are important shows true appreciation.

Most new hires are enthusiastic, motivated, and eager individuals who are well suited for their jobs. When their enthusiasm wanes, the problem isn’t whom you hired, it’s what they experienced once they began working.

What to do? Find simple yet effective ways to value your employees so they can give you value in return.

## SET STAFF UP FOR SUCCESS

Staff can’t perform when they don’t know what to do or how to do it. Law firm managers who fail to let staff know what they expect – or change what is expected without sufficient explanation – are setting their employees up for failure. Nothing will demoralize your colleagues faster.

Value employees by giving clearly stated tasks and objectives. If job duties and goals change, let employees involved know what the changes are and why they are necessary. Workers are remarkably accepting of change when they understand their necessity and remarkably resistant when they don’t. When you value your employees, you set them up for success.

## EXPLAIN HOW THEIR WORK MATTERS

It’s hard to feel that your work matters if you don’t know how or why. Let employees know how their jobs fit with the firm’s overall goals and purpose.

For example, part of a new hire’s training should be a tour of the firm and introductions not only to immediate subordinates or supervisors, but also to associates and partners. New hires should be told the firm’s areas of specialty, its mission statement, how the firm strives to live its mission, and – most importantly – how the new hire’s job aligns

with the firm’s purpose and attitude. People can’t take pride in what they don’t know.

## GIVE APPRECIATIVE FEEDBACK

Far too often, the only time employees perceive their value to the firm is when they don’t feel they have any because they have done something poorly or incorrectly. Psychology has long proven that people respond far better to positive feedback than to negative. When you consistently let employees know what they are doing right, you keep employees on the right track (as they are likely to repeat behaviors they have been praised for), increase their sense of competence, and reinforce their pride in contributing to the firm’s success.

Giving frequent, specific and targeted feedback on work done right will bolster any employee’s motivation and job satisfaction.

## ADDRESS POOR PERFORMANCE APPRECIATIVELY

Of course, employees don’t always do well, and poor performance must be addressed. However, saying “This work is terrible, do it again,” or “Can’t you do anything right?” won’t contribute to the employee’s morale or motivation. Instead, think about the employee’s value, and start with that. For example, in dealing with a secretary whose tardiness is problematic, begin by saying, “You’ve been showing a lot of progress. I really appreciate the effort you’ve been making, especially in learning the new software.” Only then do you address the area that’s not working. For example, “Now, let’s take a look at your time management. It’s not where it needs to be yet.”

When you start by appreciating and valuing what employees are doing right, they are much more able to listen appreciatively to your corrections and act on them.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Legal administrators can improve employee morale and motivation by simply incorporating an appreciation philosophy into the workplace. While the concept may be easy to grasp, consistently implementing practical and specific appreciation techniques is the key to its success.

## *about the author*

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