

Productize Wellness for Legal Teams



BY RONA K RAY

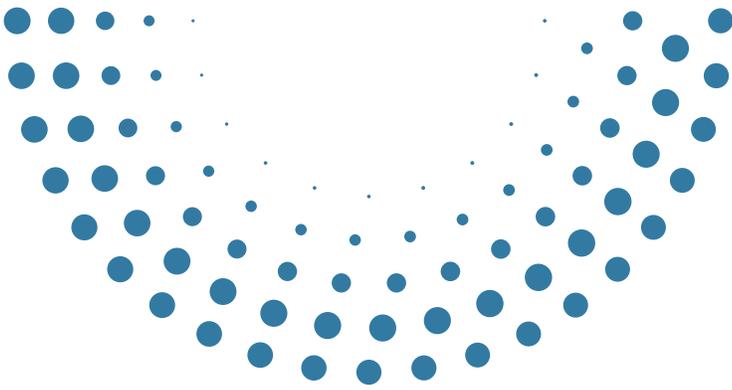
General Counsel & Growth Company Advisor



Legal teams have superpowers.

We bring reason and analysis to complicated problems and thrive in environments where we can flex this muscle.

From bet-the-company litigation to shifts in law threatening your data strategy or ethics complaints pointing to an issue you know you haven't prioritized - these are high stakes where performance conditions really matter. And while we meet these challenges, how well are you taking care of your teams who are called on so often to respond in crisis? There are some striking trends in the data we should look at first (or proceed to the Wellness for Legal Checklist if you are a TL;DR type).



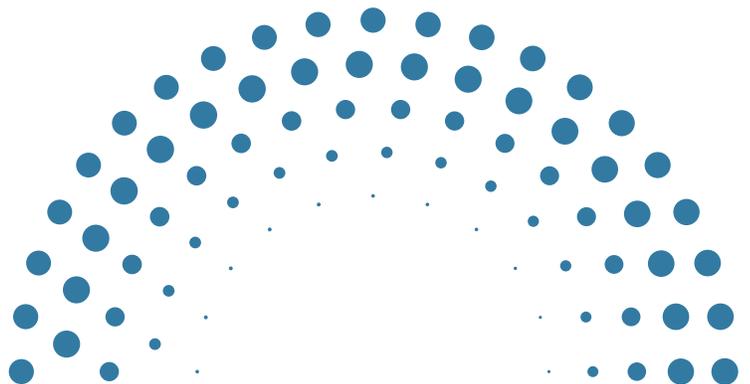
A poor work environment hurts your team and their performance. 46% of attorneys (n=11,516 participants) in a pre-pandemic 2016 survey endorsed symptoms associated with depression with 28.9% of attorneys in their first 10 years of practice experiencing problematic use of alcohol.



Law firms and legal departments must invest significantly more in their people to offset a deliberate sink-or-swim culture.



In a 2022 global survey of 10,000 people from Bain and Company, every demographic group was found to value something different when developing a personal sense of inclusion and belonging as a necessary ingredient for high performance. A work environment must fit the design of your diverse population and their environmental needs for personal well-being if you want sustainable performance – and your legal team is no exception.



A person wearing a white polo shirt is shown from the side, with their right arm extended and hand held out palm up. They are wearing a silver metal link watch on their left wrist. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Introducing a Wellness by Design Model for Sustainable Legal Teams

Effective legal teams thrive in healthy work environments that are designed for your company's specific needs. Companies that scale rapidly and constantly change need to be even more intentional and proactive about addressing challenges in their work environment. A bespoke design goes far beyond the latest fad in employee stress management, flexibility or time off – beware of off-the-shelf band-aids. Importantly, you should also have a mental health consultation process in the wings for circumstances where the actual or anticipated severity needs more thorough inspection. A sustainable design reflects how you operate, reinforces your company values, and demonstrates tangibly how each team member is included in the support of a collective mission.

Is Management Enabling Your Legal Teams?

Management develops the environment where all teams can succeed and grow when each role does their part. Leaders set a long term vision and strategy that develops a collective sense of belonging across an organization. People managers create relevance in the work carried out by teams by connecting these efforts to the vision and strategy from leadership. Legal teams don't want to operate in a silo as they endlessly scrub every vestige of risk in the company.

Effective legal teams drive meaningful impact for companies when their efforts are continuously calibrated with the company mission.



So what is the wellness strategy for building stronger connections to impact? It starts with taking inventory of your organization's values and work environment. Design wellness programs to reinforce the following:



Prioritize Values in Action:

Values create alignment across an organization. They determine how your teams engage with others and define the unique performance traits you identify will drive impact towards a common mission. Legal teams are looking for accountability and integrity.



- Hold leaders accountable to reinforce values.*** Ensure leadership is living company values. Conduct values alignment exercises within leadership to reaffirm commitments regularly. Leaders must lead by example and legal teams in particular will pick up on gaps in accountability within the organization that go unattended.

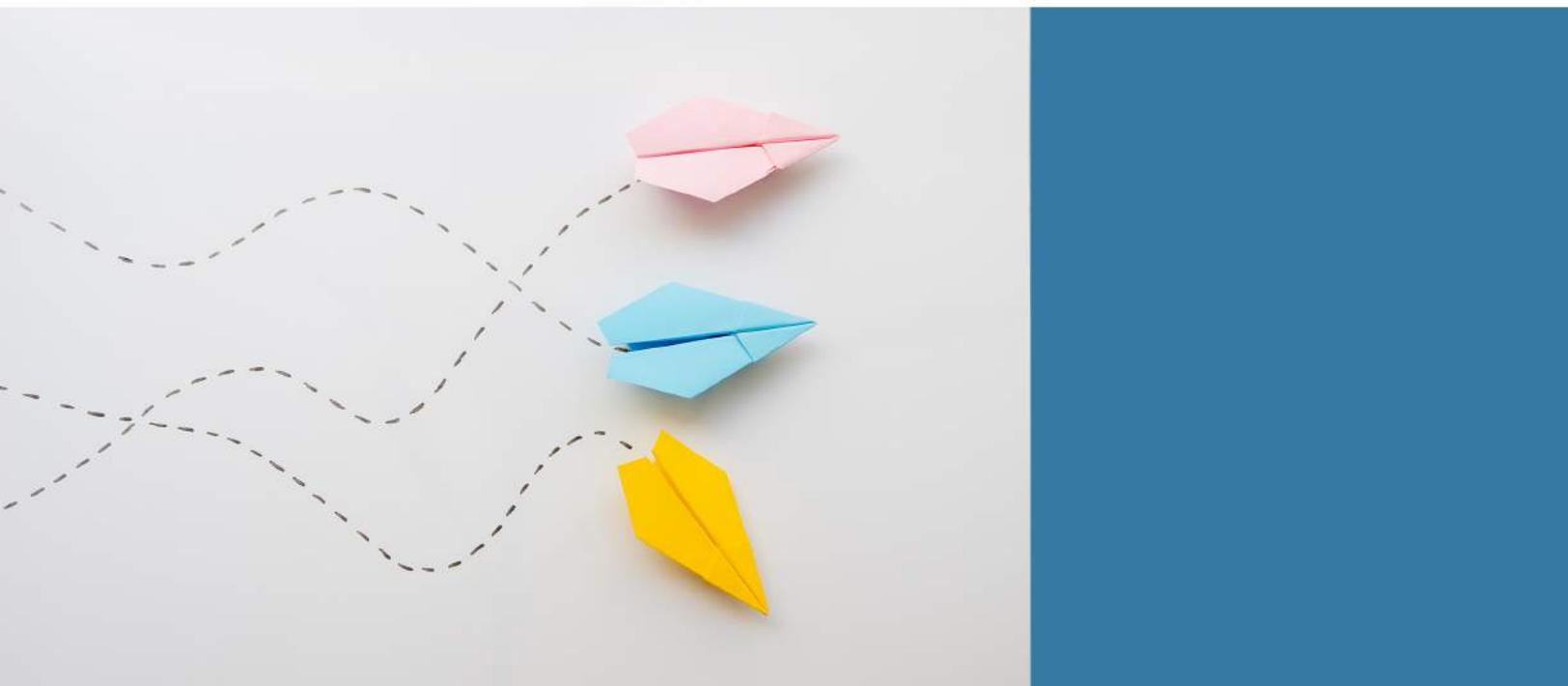
- Reinforce integrity through managers.*** Are your managers supporting peer recognition programs that strengthen the bond among team members? High performing teams set expectations of each other as the next generation of leadership. Legal values integrity when working on teams and people managers must prioritize this with how they communicate, set goals and drive performance. Legal also quickly recognizes when the experience of one group is different from another, which isn't uncommon for fast growing organizations. Managers must be interested in solving these issues proactively.



Embed Measures within your Strategy and Operations that Reinforce this Design:

Problem solving is a team sport and companies with a poor design are unable to draw upon the full talent of the team when this matters most. As you identify critical needs for the company, design a legal department strategy around meeting those business outcomes. In my experience, well positioned legal teams have consistently stood out where complexity is particularly high and solutions require cross-functional collaboration. The following steps can help you lift the tide for all boats for high performing teams:

- Leverage Strategic Project Management.** Show how collaboration works visually and verbalize what you see happening whenever you kick off a project. Invite each stakeholder and reiterate throughout the project where legal teams and business teams are doing more together to tackle challenges successfully. Reiterate the multiplier effect of flatter structures where expertise and insights are leveraged properly for results beyond what was possible with siloed efforts. Strategically place legal teams for their abilities not just a technical skill set (more on this below).



- **Build collaboration loops.** Celebrate examples of your legal team and business stakeholders living the values especially on key projects. Pause on key challenges and create an environment where they work together to solve. Recognizing exemplary behavior reinforces that teams are winning together and the recognition shouldn't always be monetary. Make this part of your team Slack, group huddles, and all hands to engage business partners in celebrating legal victories or learnings and vice versa.

Are you investing in wellness like it is a product?

You must find what works for your business.

If you did a SWOT analysis, where are you most vulnerable and is the solution just to react?

The legal function attracts problem solvers.

We are experts at identifying issues and grinding through possible remedies.

If every issue is a crisis, which it often is in my experience, you are continually depleting the well.

Save capacity for real crises and develop a healthier work environment that programmatically refills the capacity of your teams.

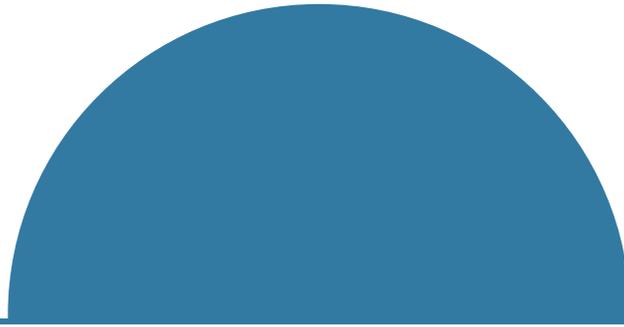




A Healthy Work Environment Builds Organizational Capability:

Legal teams typically work on multi-quarter or multi-year projects and issues. Our day to day activities build towards a longer term governance, risk management or organizational capability that legal is uniquely qualified to develop (e.g., contract negotiation as short-term and contract risk management as long-term). These capabilities endure even when someone takes a well deserved leave of absence or long after legal moves onto the next challenge. A legal capability is now designed into your business operation just like a product offering.

- Cycle intensity levels.** For legal operations teams, a best practice is to follow heavier implementation periods with more stable optimization runs to give teams a chance to assess performance. Strategically deploy outside counsel or an alternative legal service provider to do the same for teams like M&A, litigation, and privacy. Cycles where you can loop intensity levels like this will give your teams time to recover between sprints.



- Establish away-days.*** Develop programmatic away-days where people can choose their own adventure: attend a conference, build community, take professional development, work on planning/OKRs, take a long weekend, etc. If you cannot afford to give 10%, reprioritize aggressively to create this capacity, look at alternative legal service providers (like modCounsel.com), optimize your technology, lobby for resources – but don't avoid creating this time.

- Identify authentic superpowers.*** Create growth plans for your team that show how their continued success with the company translates into professional growth. Identify through 360 reviews individual and team core competencies or as I call them “superpowers.” There are legal consultants who do this really well by connecting legal team investments and maturity to company success. Contact me if you want an introduction.



A Checklist to Wrap this Up: Wellness by Design for Legal

Shortcuts in wellness lead to poor outcomes and legal teams in particular need a targeted approach. A broader organizational movement helps everyone and the checklist here will get you started down a much better path, so do your best but definitely start somewhere. Contact me if you want help getting started.

Prioritize Values in Action

- Leaders are accountable and their values are uncompromising
- Management seizes opportunities to reinforce integrity

Reinforce your Design

- Project management drives strategic engagement
- Collaboration loops are properly leveraged

Build Organizational Capability

- Wellness is a proven product offering
- Workload intensity is cycled for each of your teams
- Away-days are normalized and celebrated monthly
- Team superpowers and growth plans are identified



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