CASE STUDY: Bradley Allen Love Lawyers

Name and position of person completing the survey:
Bernadette Maher-Pratt
Events Coordinator
Bradley Allen Love Lawyers

Number of employees within the organisation:
Approximately 80

Brief description about the organisation:
We are one of the largest independent law firms in Canberra and believe our firm is a leader in the field of workplace health for lawyers and support staff alike. With over 80 employees, the Directors of Bradley Allen Love embrace the concepts of eating well, exercising daily and work/life balance for themselves and their staff.

Why did your organisation start a workplace health and wellbeing program?
The Directors of Bradley Allen Love are passionate about providing a healthy workplace and an appropriate work/life balance and understand its value for both employees and the firm as a whole. We are fiercely proud of being a law firm that practises what it preaches and providing a balanced lifestyle for its employees. The focus is not on working until you burn out but to ensure you take the time to enjoy your work environment and to maximise your performance by maintaining your health and fitness.

We started a formal program of bootcamp style physical fitness lessons for all staff in 2006. The sessions started at lunchtime and employees were given enough time to ensure after exercise they had sufficient downtime to eat lunch and get cleaned up for the afternoon. From inception the program was embraced by a large proportion of staff from part timers to Directors and our culture of a “fit firm” started to take shape. We found that the program increased employee’s engagement with each other and stronger relationships grew which also facilitated networking between staff. The benefits to both the individual staff members and the firm as a whole are immeasurable.

We are also conscious of the high rates of stress and depression that affect our profession and know that the additional vitamin D and exercise obtained through our program may go some way to alleviate this for staff. It is our goal to ensure we provide a happy and supportive workplace and we know our healthy work strategies have both a mental and physical benefit for our staff.
What did the organisation do to get a health and wellbeing program started?

We initially started with a bootcamp program and subsequently added running programs and yoga classes. More recently we have included nutrition seminars for all staff to attend at lunchtime.

Our BAL Fitness Program has escalated and for the past two years we have invented a new form of networking for our firm called “Sweatworking™ – the Bradley Allen Love way to Network”. We invite firms of accountants, commercial agents etc to participate in a gruelling circuit style exercise competition at the AIS. This is a way for Bradley Allen Love to promote our healthy workplace while also demonstrating our fitness levels, the strong team bonds and an effective way to network. In 2013 we had 18 teams participate, and every team paid a registration fee which went to a charity chosen by the winners. This encouraged all competitors to work hard for charity and as a firm we were able to give something back to the community, with Alzheimer’s Australia receiving $2000.00. Bradley Allen Love receive no direct pecuniary reward from the event.

We understand that workplace health and wellbeing is not just about physical fitness, it is about balancing a high pressure work environment with an appropriate physical release to assist the mental health of our staff.

We also encourage our staff to undertake work they are interested in or have a passion for or a connection with and due to this philosophy our firm recently won the Creative Partnerships SME Award for New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory in recognition for our work with Craft ACT – a partnership that formed due to the interests of a number of our Directors and lawyers in the Arts.

We encourage staff to get together for other charity events, such as the JDRF Walk, the Donate Life Walk, and the SIDS & Kids ACT Christmas Lights display and support them in taking time out from work to attend such events.

Were there any barriers that had to be overcome to get the program started? If so, how did you achieve this?

Our main barrier was budget, as we went from having no fitness program to suddenly requiring a budget to pay for the program and to encourage staff interest so the activities were successful and cost effective.

It is a constant challenge to include and cater for everyone in the firm. Since the establishment of the program there has been lots of trial and error to schedule appropriate activities and times which best suit our staff, and we now organise a variety of programs on different days and for different fitness levels to encourage maximum participation.

What were some of the initial strategies of your health and wellbeing program?

Initially, we wanted to improve the work/life balance for our employees and increase fitness levels. We wanted to be able to offer something different for employees and become a healthier and attractive place to work. We recognised that...
many other law firms offer gym memberships, but we thought such an approach did nothing to break down internal barriers. We wanted to foster an environment which would lead to more interaction than just making small talk around the water cooler.

We now have a diverse group of staff participating in our fitness programs, from Directors to Office Clerks.

We believe this group-orientated, entry-level staff approach to workplace health and wellbeing is a real point of differentiation for the firm, and we have juniors of the firm pulling Directors along by rubber bands! There is no hierarchy with exercise and this translates back into our workplace.

What strategies have been effective in achieving staff participation in health and wellbeing initiatives?

Competition and team morale: when colleagues and friends attend bootcamp it becomes a great team bonding opportunity and a chance to socialise with other members of the firm where staff do not see each other or interact on a daily basis. We offer new and different activities – for example many of our staff had never tried hot yoga before but were keen to try.

We have organised participation in team sport, as we find such activities are very popular among staff. For example, we compete annually in the Law Society soccer competition, cricket events and other sports days.

We try to pick inclusive marketing activities that are accessible for more people – rather than having a “typical” Golf Day, we instead have a Bowls Day which is less exclusive, promoting more networking and communication, and this has now become a signature event for the firm for over 9 years.

We have held nutrition seminars, which are highly effective in encouraging staff to eat well and to maximise both physical and mental performance.

We have an active Workplace Health and Safety committee which meets on a regular basis. The committee, made up of numerous employees from our office, is dedicated to ensuring we provide a healthy and safe workplace.

Our healthy workplace initiatives are not just top-down strategies – we openly invite staff suggestions, and many of our best ideas have originated from employees. This further encourages participation and results in a happier and healthier workplace. We are looking into chair yoga at the moment for our more sedentary staff.

What are some of the benefits that have been achieved as a result of your organisation’s health and wellbeing program?

The fitness levels of our staff have improved dramatically and morale in the workplace is high. The various programs also create some time out at lunch, with staff less likely to be eating at their keyboards and more likely to be exercising, and this has increased productivity. New staff are attracted to our firm because we offer a difference; work life balance/culture demonstrated by our successful fitness program.

What has the return on investment been since implementing your health and wellbeing program?
Health and Wellbeing
Case Study

We have measured the results for our bootcamp and yoga by way of the interest of numbers attending. We have excellent regular numbers of staff attending both of these activities, which shows fantastic support and that people are gaining something for themselves. We have also conducted surveys on our healthy events and have received very positive feedback.

We offer flu vaccinations to all staff at our cost to reduce overall sickness and absenteeism over the winter period.

For more details on Bradley Allen Love’s health and wellbeing program contact:

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If you would like to share your organisation would like to share its health and wellbeing experiences with other workplaces, please contact the Healthier Work team by emailing healthierwork@act.gov.au or phoning 02 6205 1596.