

Positive Lawyers and Law Firms

By Tish Vincent

What measures can managing partners at law firms and legal employers of various-sized entities take to foster positive engagement in their places of business? A conversation with Anne Brafford on this topic was the centerpiece of the July episode of the State Bar of Michigan On Balance podcast.¹

Brafford is a former Big Law equity partner and founder of Aspire, an educational and consultancy firm for the legal profession. She has a master's degree in applied positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and is finishing her PhD from Claremont Graduate University with an emphasis on the science of positive workplaces.² Brafford was editor-in-chief and coauthor of *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*.³ She also created *The Well-Being Toolkit for Lawyers and Legal Employers* and wrote the book *Positive Professionals: Creating High-Performing Profitable Firms Through the Science of Engagement*.⁴

Brafford emphasizes the importance of engagement in building a positive law firm. She doesn't leave her audience wondering how to encourage engagement; she lays out a plan of action. For example, guidance for starting a well-being initiative can be found in the *Well-Being Toolkit*:

- Enlist leaders
- Launch a well-being committee
- Define well-being
- Conduct a needs assessment
- Identify priorities
- Create and execute an action plan
- Create a well-being policy
- Continually measure, evaluate, and improve⁵

This list can be used to establish a well-being initiative or to upgrade and improve an existing one. These steps begin a process that changes the workplace dynamic and can lead to a more positive environment where employees feel inspired to create more happiness and engagement for themselves.

Brafford has drawn together many excellent resources in the *Well-Being Toolkit*; it is impossible to list them all in this article. One resource is an activity workbook. In it, a worksheet titled "How to Be Happier? Make it a Priority" lays out a plan for increasing personal happiness. It emphasizes prioritizing positivity, choosing high-value happiness activities, and planning and tracking progress.⁶

Practicing law is stressful. The ideas suggested by Brafford and the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being are well worth your time. Read the report and become familiar with the toolkit; both are available for free from the American Bar Association (the links are in endnotes to this article). Printed copies of both sit on my desk for ready reference.

Listen to the conversation with Brafford on the SBM On Balance podcast. Her en-

thusiasm and expertise as a thought leader in lawyer wellness will inspire you. ■

Tish Vincent is the program administrator for the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Mindful Law Firm—Using Positivity to Increase Well-Being*, On Balance Podcast, SBM <<https://www.michbar.org/pmc/podcast>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed July 24, 2019.
2. *About Me, Anne Brafford*, Aspire <<https://aspire.legal/>>.
3. *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change [The Report of the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being]*, ABA (August 2017) <<https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/ThePathToLawyerWellBeingReportRevFINAL.pdf>> [<https://perma.cc/FX9W-FXXS>].
4. Brafford, *Well-Being Toolkit for Lawyers and Legal Employers*, ABA (August 2018) <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer_assistance/lscolap_well-being_toolkit_for_lawyers_legal_employers.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/S7PJ-QZDK>] and Brafford, *Positive Professionals: Creating High-Performing Profitable Firms Through the Science of Engagement* (Chicago: ABA Book Publishing, 2017).
5. *Well-Being Toolkit*, pp 10–11.
6. *Well-Being Toolkit*, pp 45–48.

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