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Recruitment

Massage Before Court? No Problem; Call the Firm Concierge

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LOS ANGELES — When Casey Sobhani, a real estate senior counsel at Liner Yankelevitz Sunshine & Regenstreif, got the call to attend a black-tie event for a client in two days, he momentarily panicked. He didn't know where or how to get a tuxedo at such short notice. But by the time of the event, not only did Sobhani have his tuxedo, but the reservations for his fitting had been made for him, and he was driven to the fitting with no need to fight mid-day Los Angeles traffic — courtesy of his law firm's new concierge service.

In October, Westwood-based Liner Yankelevitz launched a service for firm attorneys in which a full-time staff member, the concierge, would facilitate their errands — ranging from grocery shopping to shoe repair — in an effort to strengthen retention and attorney wellness.

"It's kind of like a concierge service at a five-star hotel where the mentality is if you ask for it, they're going to do everything they can to help you," Sobhani said.

Liner Yankelevitz attorneys are saving time in order to dedicate more of their waking hours to their work and personal relationships, said Stuart Liner, the firm's managing partner.

"To the extent we can have lawyers spend more time with family, billing work, work time - all those things are better uses [of time]," Liner said.

He said he came up with the idea while sitting down with an attorney at the firm who was having trouble finding a balance in time among her work, family and commitments to charity.

"It became clear to me to have people on staff to accomplish things to grow the list - the list of things somebody else can do for you," Liner said.

In addition to the concierge service, the firm pays for staff gym memberships, caters weekly healthy breakfasts and offers on-site massages and manicures. Liner said he has seen a marked increase in lawyer productivity since launching the wellness program — so far in November, attorneys have averaged an increase of 10 billed hours compared to the same number of days in October. Liner said, however, that it is too soon to credit the increase to the program.

Joel Winston, a professional concierge who runs his own online service called E-Concierge, was hired by the firm to run the concierge program. Winston works in the firm's Westwood office. He could not be reached for comment. He coordinates requests from attorneys daily and, along with another staff member, runs the errands throughout the day.

Patricia Oliver, a senior counsel at the firm who is a single mother, said she could see the program strengthening the retention of women in the firm. Oliver said that, two weeks ago, she was in a minor car accident that would have prevented her from being able to pick up her son from school. The concierge rented her a car and arranged for car repairs, saving 20 hours of her time, Oliver said.

"Especially for women in the same situation as I'm in, where they have to worry about juggling family and taking care of the family and doing it all yourself, it's helpful," Oliver said.

Sobhani said several women associates from large law firms whom the firm is working to recruit have been impressed with the wellness program.

"One person we were recruiting couldn't believe it, especially with the circumstances of commuting and the balancing of personal lives," Sobhani said.

The idea of running a concierge service at businesses is nothing new to the corporate

world. General Mills, Ernst & Young and Google Inc. all have reported concierge services as part of the perks for full-time employees.

But a concierge service at a law firm is an enterprising idea, according to representatives from several Los Angeles law firms and legal recruiting firms contacted for this story. Fulbright & Jaworski offers a concierge service, but only at its Houston location.

"I have not heard of that, at least by name of the concierge service, at any firm," said John Jameson with the legal search firm The Jameson Group.

Jameson said the perk is a good business move for Liner because the program is a relatively cheap way for attorneys to focus on their work and dedicate more hours to the firm while feeling better-balanced in their lives.

"With the hours lawyers are expected to work, it's a win-win for both sides - for the firm providing it and the lawyers who get the benefits," Jameson said.

He said the concierge service may seem over the top at first but is an inexpensive way to increase profits.

"When you look at the amounts of money law firms are competing to pay even their youngest associates, I'd think the cost of the concierge is really minimal compared to that," Jameson said. "If you could create a little extra billing by all the lawyers served by the concierge, then I actually think it's a very smart idea."

Liner said firm attorneys increasingly are using the concierge service but have needed "retraining" to begin focusing more on their well-being.

"The world's moving quicker," Liner said. "We've got to figure out ways of protecting ourselves and taking care of ourselves."

Liner has 80 attorneys statewide, including an office in San Francisco.