

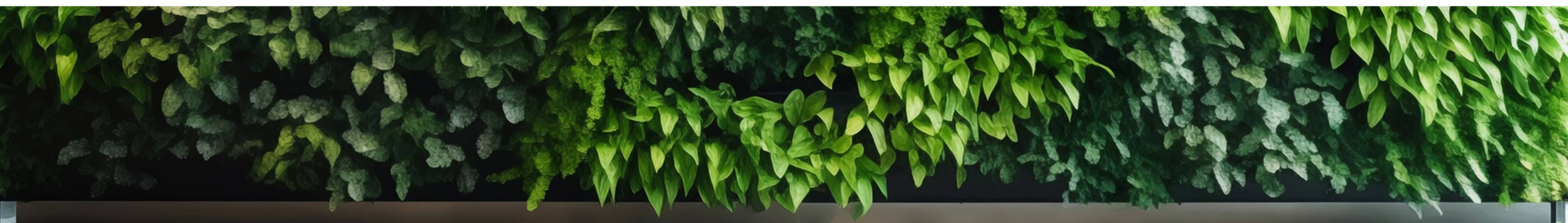


HIDING THE VEGGIES

Incorporating Well-Being Practices into Professional Culture

By Julie Anna Alvarez Rivera and Erin Warner

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Just like a “sneaky chef” mixes the good-for-you veggies into a meal to ensure finicky eaters get their necessary nutrition, embedding well-being practices into your current initiatives is a useful strategy for professionals collectively and individually. Wellness plans and practices can cover the full range from comprehensive initiatives that touch everyone to personal actions that impact day-to-day activities and uplift culture.

Fordham University School of Law, for example, drawing on the Jesuit value of *cura personalis*,

or “care for the whole person,” offers a vigorous mental health and wellness co-curriculum developed by its Office of Professionalism. This includes two required courses for 1L students: *Wellness 101: Strategies for Maintaining Health and Happiness in Law School and Practice* and *Secrets to Success: Growth Mindset and Resilience*. While many other programs covering professional well-being topics are offered, alongside access to advising and counseling through the Office of Student Affairs, as well as free and confidential counseling and psychiatric services through Fordham Counseling and

Psychological Services, the aforementioned programs required for all 1Ls provide students with a strong foundation as they enter the stressful legal profession.

Building on the Foundation

Having that foundation encourages students to continue making their mental health and wellness a priority and take advantage of the optional programs offered. This curriculum is part of how Fordham has chosen to support its students regarding the Mental & Emotional category of the Eight Pillars of Wellness. The school further offers programming and/or resources touching on the other seven pillars: social, intellectual, financial, spiritual, physical, occupational, and environmental. Students continue to have a foundation in self-care based on the professionalism programming requirement of Fundamental Lawyering Skills. The upper year courses include many of the pillars including financial and occupational wellness.

Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP became an early signatory (2019) of the ABA Well-Being in the Legal Profession Pledge and the firm was ahead of the curve in considering its commitment to well-being as firm-wide and not

just focused on the lawyers. (Note: the current pledge now specifically includes “staff” in describing the target populations.) While some aspects of what makes the client-driven legal profession stressful are not ones that any firm can singlehandedly transform, Cravath focuses on embedding well-being into the firm culture. For example, the firm encourages people to use their vacations, and the team system within the firm better enables associates to disconnect during their time off. The firm’s more formalized efforts fall into two categories: benefits (such as the “Calm” meditation app membership available to all) and programs.

The firm aims to spearhead at least four programs annually that bring outside experts (often speakers who are former lawyers that share the lived experience of working at a firm), and at least one of these programs each year focuses on substance abuse. Other programming can vary, but one example is a nutritional psychiatrist speaking about the link between nutrition and mental health which was then followed by a series of online cooking classes that featured menus with “brain foods” that help combat anxiety and depression.

Another program from a mental health clinician focused on understanding and addressing

personal mental health in an inclusive way. Whenever possible and appropriate, Cravath offers these programs for CLE credit as a means for lawyers to further their practice. However, in creating programming, the Firm is conscious to address topics that are relevant firmwide for both lawyers and administrative professionals. Management at the firm has been supportive of well-being initiatives because they too understand the challenges faced as legal professionals and in working in a client-service business, and they understand the important role that well-being plays in shaping professional experiences. Firm partners are often part of the programs that are held, engaging in Q&A, and sharing their own experience as it relates to an expert's topic. Cravath's commitment in this area demonstrates its understanding that providing lawyers and administrative professionals the well-being tools to take care of themselves and support one another is essential to its service to clients.

Personal Efforts Yield Big Results

It is encouraging to know that law schools and firms continue to make significant progress in recognizing the need to educate and offer well-being resources. Delivering system-wide change can be slow-moving by nature. It is vital to remember the important role that small, thoughtful, and sustained individual contributions play in advancing well-being

efforts. Individual efforts not only improve one's own well-being, but can positively influence colleagues, inform leaders on topics of interest and importance, and embed beneficial practices into professional culture.

A productive way to start is to identify which habits and practices are serving us well and which are preventing us from engaging at our best and highest levels personally or professionally. Once we uncover pain points, challenges, strengths, and interests we can choose activities, set goals, monitor progress, and maintain motivation in a way that is personally meaningful. Like ripples in a pond, a small action can have wide-reaching and significant effects.

Below are some ideas for sneaking healthy supplements into your daily routines.

- **Start your day with a positive affirmation.** Invite the momentum that comes from recognizing a strength or recent win.
- **Empower transition activities.** Take a few sips of water every time you finish a call. Do some stretches at your desk each time you finish working on a document.
- **Prioritize Regular Breaks.** Take a walk outside around lunchtime to get some fresh air or clear your head...or remember to eat lunch.

- **Influence time.** Consider adjusting team meeting times to start five minutes after the hour and wrap five minutes before the hour to allow transition breaks. Block time on your calendar for focus work.
- **Embrace social interactions.** Introduce yourself to or check in on a recently hired colleague. Walk to a colleague's office or pick up the phone instead of sending an email.
- **Incorporate movement.** Intentionally take the stairs to walk to a different part of the building to refill your water or for your bio breaks.
- **End your day on a positive note.** Tidy your desk to create a welcoming space for your arrival the next morning. Send a note to thank someone who was particularly helpful or to wish someone well on an upcoming project.

Establishing practices to advance well-being initiatives can feel daunting and competing demands for our time and attention can make it difficult to prioritize changes — even when they are in our own best interest. However, intentionally bringing well-being actions into our standard routines empowers us to influence this critical culture shift across our institutions — so let's keep going! +

CRAVATH, SWAINE & MOORE LLP

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