

MoFo Puts Commitment To Attys' Mental Health In Writing

By **Kevin Penton**

Law360 (October 15, 2021, 12:58 PM EDT) -- For attorneys, poor mental health isn't limited to medical diagnoses; it can come from getting slammed too often with assignments on a Friday night, or a seemingly never-ending series of deadlines.

Morrison & Foerster LLP is now publicly committing to avoiding that for its attorneys and staff, releasing a series of statements that emphasize its fidelity to mental health and to reducing the factors that can contribute to it.

Morrison & Foerster told its lawyers and staff in a so-called mental health charter that its commitment will not be limited to diagnosed conditions but also include stress and burnout, Brad Wine, co-chair of the firm's litigation department and chair of its Israel practice, told Law360 on Wednesday.

Part of ensuring that attorneys at Morrison & Foerster are mentally healthy is making certain that any deal or case is properly staffed, so that those working on it are not pushed past their limits, said Wine, a member of the firm's mental health steering committee.

The firm intends to be as flexible as possible with attorney schedules and assignments while still ensuring that its clients receive the service that they expect from the firm, he said.

"We work in a large firm with lots of colleagues, and so we should approach exercises as teams, as opposed to pretending like we're in a small firm or are solo practitioners and the only person who can get something done is me," Wine said.

The charter is the latest outcome to originate from a yearslong emphasis by Morrison & Foerster on ensuring that its attorneys and staff are mentally healthy. Among its efforts in recent years, the firm launched a well-being program that provides various support resources to employees, it created the mental health steering committee, it initiated training programs, and it encouraged firm leaders to share their own mental health stories.

The charter clarifies that Morrison & Foerster is committed to promoting a culture that fosters everyone's well-being, that the mental health steering committee will develop communications to encourage the adoption of various best practices, and that it wants to preserve a workplace culture in which everyone thrives.

"We aim to reduce the stigma associated with mental health status, and to share tools to permit

everyone at the firm to support themselves and their colleagues," the charter says.

An associated set of guidelines specifies various recommended practices, including that employees should take breaks when they need to, that emails sent after hours should specify whether an immediate response is required, and that attorneys and staff should inquire with others about their workloads.

"Employees are encouraged to communicate and collaborate with their teams to determine demands on each person's time and ensure everyone has time to rest knowing that their colleagues will step in to ensure client commitments are met," said Jason McCord, the firm's chief human resources and administration officer.

--Editing by Brian Baresch.

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