

Wellness Matters

When it comes to wellness, Jackson Kelly has laid down the law...good health is essential to the organization. As the largest law firm in West Virginia, this progressive organization has harnessed senior-level leadership in pursuit of organizational health. The verdict is in and the results are no surprise. | By Crystal Good

Jackson Kelly's health insurance premiums are on the decline. Absenteeism from illness is down and the law firm's employees and their families are getting healthier. But it was not always that way. "Like many people, I was gravely concerned with the statistics illustrating the poor quality of wellness in West Virginia," says Steve LaCagnin, administrative manager of Jackson Kelly PLLC's Morgantown office. "According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 11,000 new cases of cancer are diagnosed in West Virginia every year. The mortality rate from heart disease is nearly 25 percent higher for West Virginians than other Americans; the mortality rate from diabetes is nearly 20 percent higher. I wanted to ensure the statistics did not effect our attorneys and staff. I knew we had to do something about it."

Jackson Kelly PLLC, the oldest and largest law firm based in West Virginia, is blazing a new trail in

the legal community through a comprehensive wellness program that is proving that the stereotypical images of the legal professional – hard-charging, heavy smoking, stressed out, overweight and overworked lawyers and staff – do not have to be reality.

Wellness initiatives at Jackson Kelly are designed to create a process toward better health and living. For instance, paralegals at the firm share and comment on "live foods" recipes from *The Well Workplace* newsletter, attorneys call the *well workplace* support number when they have problems at home and administrative assistants and their families are walking toward the "100 Miles in 100 Days" challenge. These employees are using the wellness program to positively influence their health, family life, emotional well-being and, ultimately, their careers.

The seeds of the Jackson Kelly Wellness Initiative were first sown

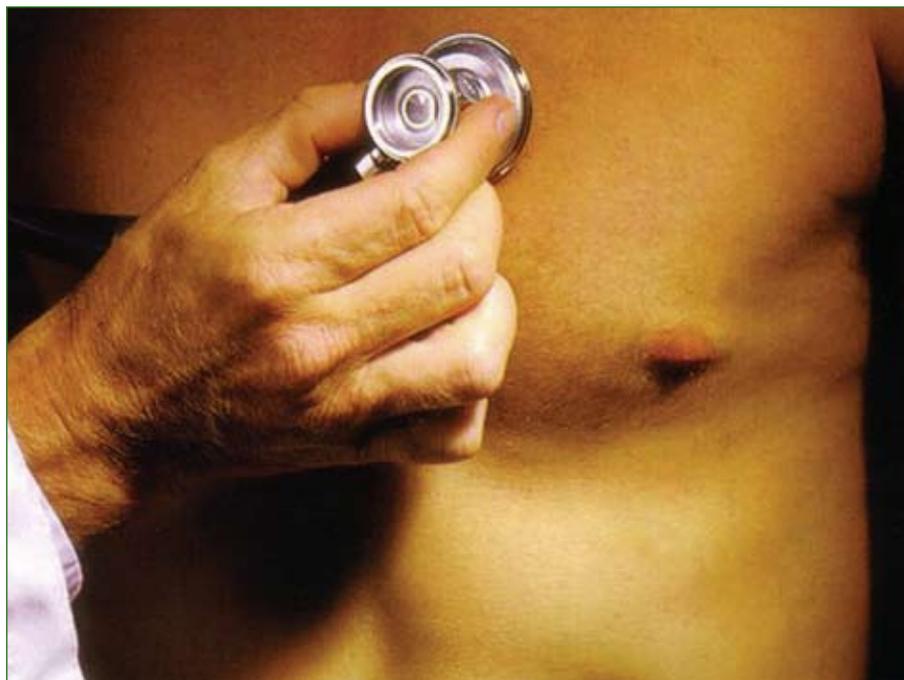


Environmental consideration in the design of the offices make Jackson Kelly a pleasant place to work.

in 1999 when Janette Gidley, the firm's Morgantown office manager read about the efforts of the Wellness Council of America (WELCOA). WELCOA, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting healthier lifestyles for all Americans, focuses on wellness promotion initiatives at the workplace and provides resources and a communication infrastructure for community coalitions through local Wellness Councils. Curious to learn more about the benefits of a progressive wellness initiative, Gidley attended WELCOA's intensive "Well Workplace University."

The Challenge And Potential Return

Research shows that many health problems can be avoided through diet and exercise. According to the National Center for Policy Analysis report *The Cost of Preventable Illness*, obesity-related health problems cost American businesses an estimated \$13 billion in 1994 – \$8 billion in

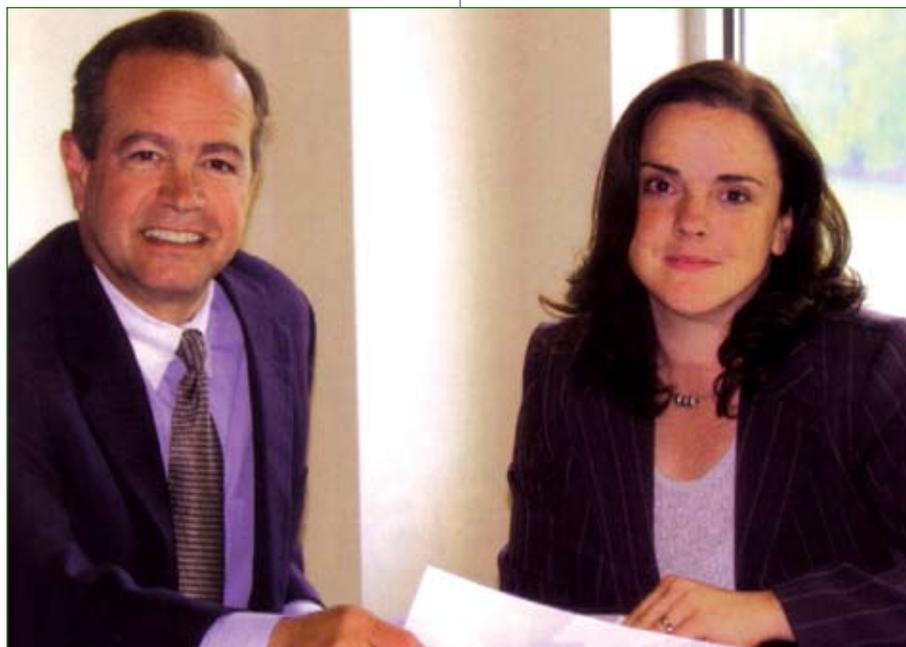


health insurance costs, \$2.4 billion for sick leave, \$1.8 billion for life insurance and nearly \$1 billion for disability insurance. The risk of developing many serious and costly medical conditions, including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, infertility and many forms of cancer, may be prevented through effective weight management.

According to David Hunnicutt, president of WELCOA, "Presently, with respect to exercise, less than 25 percent of the population is currently physically active. What is more, 2/3 of the population is considered overweight and/or obese and 22 percent of the population uses tobacco products."

Wellness programs yield a proven return on investment. Research indicates that for every dollar an employer invests in effective wellness programs, the employer realizes \$3-\$5 in return through reduced health care costs, health insurance premiums and costs of attrition.

With case studies supporting the ability of workplace wellness to prevent illnesses, reduce absenteeism, boost morale and reduce health care costs, LaCagnin's next step was to educate senior management about how to capitalize on the old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."



Steve LaCagnin and Janette Gidley

Effective Wellness Programs

The university curriculum offered Gidley tangible and proven approaches to establishing a comprehensive wellness initiative. According to Sharon Covert, director of the Wellness Council of West Virginia, “There are seven basic steps inherent to the organizations that will consistently produce results. Success always starts with support by senior level management.”

The seven steps to which Covert refers are known as the “7Cs”:

1. Concentrating on Senior Level Support
2. Creating Cohesive Wellness Teams
3. Collecting Data to Drive Health Efforts
4. Crafting an Operating Plan
5. Choosing Appropriate Interventions

6. Creating a Supportive Environment
7. Consistently Evaluating Outcomes

Following the 7Cs, Gidley and LaCagnin helped structure the Morgantown office’s plan and select their internal Wellness Committee. In 2000, Morgantown was the first Jackson Kelly office to establish a wellness initiative, which has since been implemented throughout Jackson Kelly’s offices in West Virginia, Kentucky, Colorado, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. A representative from each of the 11 Jackson Kelly offices serves on a firm-wide Wellness Coordinating Committee. “What makes Jackson Kelly unique is that they’re one of the smaller number of companies in the U.S. to actually build a results-oriented wellness program based on WELCOA’s seven benchmarks of success,” notes Hunnicutt.

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law firm.”

The university faculty was insistent that the success of wellness initiatives depends on having senior management support. When presented with the information gathered by Gidley and LaCagnin, Jackson Kelly CEO Al Emch became an integral supporter of and participant in the firm’s wellness initiative. “Many programs fail because chief executive officers don’t get behind it. At Jackson Kelly, both Al Emch and Steve LaCagnin have endorsed this initiative whole-heartedly and, as a result, the program has become one of the finest for small and mid-sized firms in the United States,” says Hunnicutt.

The Program

Ultimately, wellness is a mixture of tangible, measurable elements (like costs) and more intangible, elusive elements (like happiness). To reach those intangibles, a firm must care about its people, not just the bottom line. As Jackson Kelly CEO, Al Emch believes that every member of the Jackson Kelly team is family. That family includes 170 attorneys and 260 staff. “No organization or institution can be successful unless it is imbued



Members of the Jackson Kelly walking team take a noon time stroll in downtown Charleston.

The Jackson Kelly Wellness Committee

According to the Sleep Foundation, sleep experts say most adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep each night for optimum performance, health and safety. Below are 10 tips on how you can obtain adequate sleep.

1. Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule including weekends.
2. Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine such as soaking in a hot bath or hot tub and then reading a book or listening to soothing music.
3. Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool.
4. Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows.
5. Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex.
6. Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before your regular bedtime.
7. Exercise regularly. It is best to complete your workout at least a few hours before bedtime.
8. Avoid caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate) close to bedtime. It can keep you awake.
9. Avoid nicotine (e.g. cigarettes, tobacco products). Used close to bedtime, it can lead to poor sleep.
10. Avoid alcohol close to bedtime.

For additional information on healthy sleep habits visits: <http://www.sleepfoundation.org>

Disclaimer: It is important to note that the information provided is not intended to replace a consultation with a personal physician but is to serve only as a source of information.

with a deep sense of appreciation for the individual. To succeed we must pay attention to those around us; we must try to know them, to appreciate their strengths and weaknesses, to care about their lives and families and help them grow," says Emch. "Everyone at Jackson Kelly, from the CEO to mail clerks, is considered when developing plans for the well-being of the 'family.'"

The Jackson Kelly wellness initiative offers health screenings, health fairs, monthly newsletters and weekly emails. Periodic Lunch and Learn sessions offer an open forum with experts to discuss wellness issues of interest to each office. Session topics have included credit counseling, yoga, Pilates, sleep disorders and stress and weight management. Jackson Kelly retained Partners in Corporate Health to provide an in-depth health risk appraisal and blood analysis for employees. Last year, in return for better health insurance rates, 98 percent of Jackson Kelly's employees participated in the program.

Research indicates that physical environment matters immensely to the well-being of employees. While work environments naturally differ in each of the 11 Jackson Kelly offices, the firm continues to incorporate ergonomic workstations in its offices and has established indirect lighting systems and "white noise" systems that create slow, soothing "whoosh" sounds to introduce a subtle and calming element to the hustle and bustle of office activity.

The firm's weight management program includes participation in the "100 Miles in 100 Days" walking challenge. Participating employees are

encouraged to accumulate 100 miles by walking, jogging, roller-blading or stair climbing. "It does not matter how you log the 100 miles, just that you do it," says Gidley.

Currently 150 Jackson Kelly staff and attorneys are accumulating miles. Other weight management initiatives include an in-house Weight Watchers program, for which participants are allowed to deduct the expense directly through payroll, and reduced health club memberships rates negotiated by Jackson Kelly management. In addition, the firm will pay the reasonable cost of any initial smoking cessation program selected by any lawyer or employee.

At Emch's direction, the firm offers health insurance to employees who work 30 hours per week, instead of requiring the traditional 40 hour week to qualify. In addition, the firm has created leave incentives to encourage employees to make appointments with health care providers and has amended



Jackson Kelly PLLC, Morgantown, West Virginia office

its health plan to pay the full cost of periodic physical exams for all participants.

Another important element of the Jackson Kelly wellness initiative is a toll free hotline that allows employees and their families to access confidential counseling and health coaching services 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

“Early intervention can take care of issues before they become troublesome,” says Sara Walker, Jackson Kelly’s human resources director, “We offer a free, confidential beBetter workplace support line. Employees can call the hotline and discuss any personal problem with an experienced behavioral health professional.”

The wellness initiative also focuses on making the workday more manageable and less stressful, including in-office massages, copy, mail and dry cleaning services. In addition, like any wellness program focused, in part, on the emotional well-being of employees, there are social activities that help foster Jackson Kelly’s collegial atmosphere.

One of the hallmarks of a successful wellness program is its adaptability – they are not “one size fits all.” Each office is encouraged to develop programs and initiatives based on the needs and interests of its population. For example, 78 percent of Jackson Kelly’s wellness participants are women, so there are specific programs directed at issues of particular concern to that demographic group.

Program Benefits

Already, the return on Jackson Kelly’s investment in wellness has

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been impressive. The firm averages approximately 65 percent participation in most programs and events. High levels of participation are a measure of success in any wellness program. LaCagnin’s pioneering efforts reduced Morgantown absenteeism by 33 percent in the first year.

In recent years Jackson Kelly has experienced a burst in rising health care premiums, with the largest single increase – 35 percent – occurring in 2001. However, since the implementation of its wellness program, the firm has been able to reverse the tide. In 2005, health insurance premiums decreased by 21 percent – a first for the self-insured law firm. Owing to the wellness initiative, Jackson Kelly was able to waive dependent health insurance premiums for three months in 2004.

To date, health care screenings and health-risk appraisals provided by the firm have identified employees with serious heart disease, kidney disease, pre-cancerous lesions, high cholesterol, gallbladder disease, diabetes and hypertension. Early detection of these conditions

has allowed Jackson Kelly to preemptively treat and prevent long-term illnesses and death.

Jackson Kelly’s efforts have been noted by WELCOA. Since the inception of its wellness initiative, Jackson Kelly has earned four WELCOA awards – three bronze (Charleston, Martinsburg and Morgantown) and one silver (Morgantown) – for its commitment to employee wellness. “It was great to watch this effort spread throughout the firm,” LaCagnin says. “Bill Powell, my counterpart in Jackson Kelly’s Martinsburg office, has shown exemplary leadership in their wellness efforts.”

As noted by Hunnicutt, “In light of the fact that health care costs are now \$1.6 trillion in the United States – with 99 percent of these dollars being spent on disease after it’s already manifested – Jackson Kelly is unique in its attempt to prevent disease before it takes hold of a working population. This is what makes Jackson Kelly an important case study and one that few law firms in the United States have attempted.”

Pay It Forward

Jackson Kelly does not want to benefit exclusively from its experience. Rather, the firm considers wellness a local, statewide and national issue.

Once a pupil, Gidley is now a regular member of the faculty of the Well Workplace University. LaCagnin and Gidley are actively involved in the Tri-County Well Region Initiative in North Central West Virginia, and LaCagnin serves on the boards of directors of WELCOA and the West Virginia Wellness Council.

As a Board member of WELCOA, LaCagnin is part of a team that helps develop the Well Workplace criteria that are adopted nationally. Named one of the Most Influential People by Morgantown's Dominion Post newspaper and 2004 Lawyer Citizen of the Year by the West Virginia State Bar, LaCagnin is regularly asked to

speak on wellness throughout West Virginia. He recently spoke to a group of CEOs in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, about the benefits derived from a well workplace program.

According to Covert, "We are a state of only 1.8 million, but we had 35 successful well workplace applications last year – the closest state to West Virginia had only 10. Our state is leading the nation in wellness initiatives."

Outreach

Emch is proud of the firm's success. "We have had people who have, in fact, been able to stop smoking; people who have been able to make noticeable, discernable, measurable progress in their own nutrition or lifestyle or exercise regimen," he says.

Jackson Kelly stands behind its motto: Strength. Stability. Security.

When It Matters. Wellness, for Jackson Kelly, matters. The firm now actively promotes its wellness programs in all of its offices, reaching West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Kentucky and Washington, D.C.

Jackson Kelly has a long standing prominence in the community with time honored traditions and a proud history. But like all institutions with enduring value, the firm recognizes that its future is only as strong as its ability to adapt to the ever changing needs of its clients. Jackson Kelly is now applying that same diligence and vision to empower the wellness of each employee.

"It matters because wellness saves the lives of our most valuable asset, our people," says LaCagnin. "It's simply the right thing to do."

This article was originally published in West Virginia Executive magazine. For more information about this executive publication and/or to see the article in its original form, please contact West Virginia Executive at 877-346-8863 or info@wvexecutive.com.

