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For Lawyers, Perks to Fit a Lifestyle

By [LYNNLEY BROWNING](#)

Even lawyers need a hug. When workdays stretch into worknights and the pressure to meet the quota for billable hours grows, lawyers and staff members at the firm of Perkins Coie can often expect a little bonus.

In Perkins Coie's Chicago office, members of the firm's "happiness committee" recently left candied apples on everyone's desks. Last month, the happiness committee surprised lawyers, paralegals and assistants in the Washington office with milkshakes from a local Potbelly Sandwich Works, a favorite lunch spot.

"That's the whole beauty of it all — it's random acts of kindness," said Lori Anger, client relations manager of Perkins Coie, which is based in Seattle. "We have pretty strict hours, so it's a nice way to surprise people."

The benefits for lawyers have burgeoned in recent years as firms pull out the stops to attract top-notch talent. While perks for the partners have always been common, many are now finding their way to associates — young lawyers who have not yet made partner.

And with those associates routinely jumping ship to go elsewhere, law firms are trying to create a workplace that caters to their young recruits' wants and needs, while freeing them to bill 60 hours or more a week.

"We're in a war for talent," Gary Beu, chief human resources officer at the firm of Kirkland & Ellis, said, "and we have to do everything we can to attract and retain that talent."

The benefits go beyond the laptops and BlackBerrys, late-night rides home, Friday beer-and-pretzel fests and sports tickets that are standard fare at many large and midsize law firms. Many of the new perks recognize a lifestyle change that law firms are just coming to grips with.

"Money is not the only thing that drives these lawyers right now," said Marina Sirras, who runs a recruitment firm in New York for lawyers. "They want to be able to have a family and enjoy their family. This has never been as hot an issue."

Law firms have been slower than some other businesses to award benefits, in part because of their smaller, and often complex, private structures.

On offer now are concierge services, in which a lawyer can have the equivalent of a personal valet pick up theater and sports tickets, the dry cleaning, take a car to the repair shop or even choose a Halloween costume.

"We compete in terms of having a life," Ms. Anger said. "We don't compete by dangling a lot of material perks." Unusual in the industry, Perkins Coie offers pet insurance.

The perks come on top of higher salaries and larger bonuses — this year, the top-offs have been doubled at some

practices. At the New York office of Cravath, Swaine & Moore, an old-line firm, associates will receive special payouts of \$10,000 to \$50,000, in addition to their year-end bonuses up to \$35,000.

At the same time, law firms have begun demanding more from associates, raising minimum billable hours over the years.

To combat burnout, some firms also offer extended sabbaticals for a wide range of pursuits — to study classical piano, for instance, or work on political campaigns.

But while some of these benefits take the form of highly practical solutions — like on-site child care — others raise questions whether law firms are subsidizing a cushy lifestyle.

“As if a \$160,000 starting salary wasn’t enough for associates” fresh out of law school, “yes, there’s more,” said Peter Johnson of Law Practice Consultants in Boston.

For example, Sullivan & Cromwell, another old-line firm, with more than 600 lawyers, guarantees the first \$100,000 of mortgages of associates who have been with the firm for at least six months.

DLA Piper, the nation’s largest law firm, reimburses employees \$2,000 when they buy a hybrid car. Fulbright & Jaworski offers on-site tailoring and reimbursements to employees who buy a Subaru, [Nissan](#) or [General Motors](#) vehicle.

“In our business, people are our main asset so our benefits are designed to keep people happy and healthy,” a spokesman for DLA Piper, Jason Costa, said.

Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, a 600-lawyer firm based in New York, offers employees a service akin to a personal issues coach and psychotherapist through a deal with Corporate Counseling Associates of Manhattan. The consulting firm has a battery of staff psychologists and social workers to provide advice on issues including stress, anxiety, depression and divorce.

While many companies have offered employee assistance programs over the years, few have Ph.D. psychologists on staff.

A spokeswoman for Fried, Frank, Paula Zirinsky, said, “We want employees to be successful in their personal as well as their work lives.”

The new perks are separate from the wining and dining that top law firms conduct each year for their summer associates, whom they hope to lure back after they finish law school.

Still, the parties and the food for lawyers are getting better. “We’re not talking a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee anymore,” said William M. O’Connor, a partner in the boutique litigation firm of Crowell & Moring, which is based in Washington.

Crowell & Moring recently began giving wine parties at its New York office, with tuna tartare, baby lamb chops and vegetable trays. One associate requested that the firm “explore Spanish wines,” a spokeswoman related, so Crowell & Moring recently provided bottles of a 2001 Rondan and a 2005 Olivares Altos de la Hoya.

At Cravath, Swaine & Moore's New York office, lawyers who work into the evenings can have dinner delivered, on a silver tray, from the [Palm](#) restaurant, a hot spot for media and financial executives.

Law firms, awash in cash from a banner year of deal making and private equity activity, now consider the training programs they run for their associates to be major perks.

But Mr. Johnson of Law Practice Consultants said that some corporate clients paying \$350 an hour and more to some associates, and double that or more to partners, were irritated. The corporate clients "don't want to be responsible for associate training," he said. "I hear them say all the time, 'they treat their associates better than I get treated at my company.'"

It is true that many of the perks have a lifestyle flavor. O'Melveny & Myers, a large California-based law firm with offices in Asia, holds yoga classes at its Newport Beach office for lawyers and their staffs. And Kilpatrick Stockton, a large firm with offices throughout the Southeast, has a nap room in its Raleigh, N.C., office, complete with a reclining chair, sofa and travel alarm clock.

"Yes, it gets used," said Carol Vassey, the chief administrator in the Raleigh office, though rarely for more than 15 minutes at a time.

Increasingly, having a life means having company-sponsored child care.

Arnold & Porter, based in Washington, was among the first to offer on-site day care, in 1995. Only a few firms, including Crowell & Morning, have followed suit — deterred, among other things, by insurance and zoning issues.

Some firms have come up with variations. Dechert, a 1,000-lawyer firm based in Philadelphia; Fried, Frank; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison; and Fulbright & Jaworski provide emergency nanny services, in which the firm will find and send a nanny to a lawyer's home.

While some lawyers scoff at what they consider frivolous perks — Baker & McKenzie calls its sabbaticals and training "meaningful benefits" — the virtues of the new benefits are in the eye of the beholder.

"Forget the pet insurance and concierge services: that's setting up people's lives, and I find that appalling," said Mitchell S. Roth, a principal at Much Shelist Denenberg Ament & Rubenstein, a comparatively small firm based in Chicago. "The perk we offer in our world is a culture of collegiality and training."

Still, Mr. Roth acknowledged that Much Shelist occasionally brought in a masseuse.

"It's for morale," he said.

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