

How These Top Firms Make Their Attorneys The Happiest

By **Anna Sanders**

Law360 (March 28, 2022, 11:02 AM EDT) -- Transparency, career development, community and flexibility are key to ensuring a happy and productive staff, particularly as the coronavirus pandemic continues to upend traditional work, according to leaders at the firms that topped the list in Law360 Pulse's most recent Lawyer Satisfaction Survey.

More than 1,200 attorneys participated this year in a survey gauging their satisfaction with the profession, job demands and their employers.

Overall, 66% said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their job, a slight dip from the 69% who said the same during last year's survey. While 15% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 19% were unhappy with their job.

Job Satisfaction Still High

Attorneys remain satisfied with their jobs, though the percentage of those who are very satisfied dipped a few points this year.

2021



2022



■ Very dissatisfied ■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ■ Very satisfied
■ Dissatisfied ■ Satisfied

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with their compensation and billable hours, and 76% said the same about the collegiality and collaboration at their firms.

Fisher Phillips topped **Law360 Pulse's list of firms** where staff were happiest, according to an informal ranking based on average satisfaction levels for compensation, billable hours, collegiality, job advancement opportunities and the job overall. The ranking only includes law firms where at least four attorneys responded to the survey.

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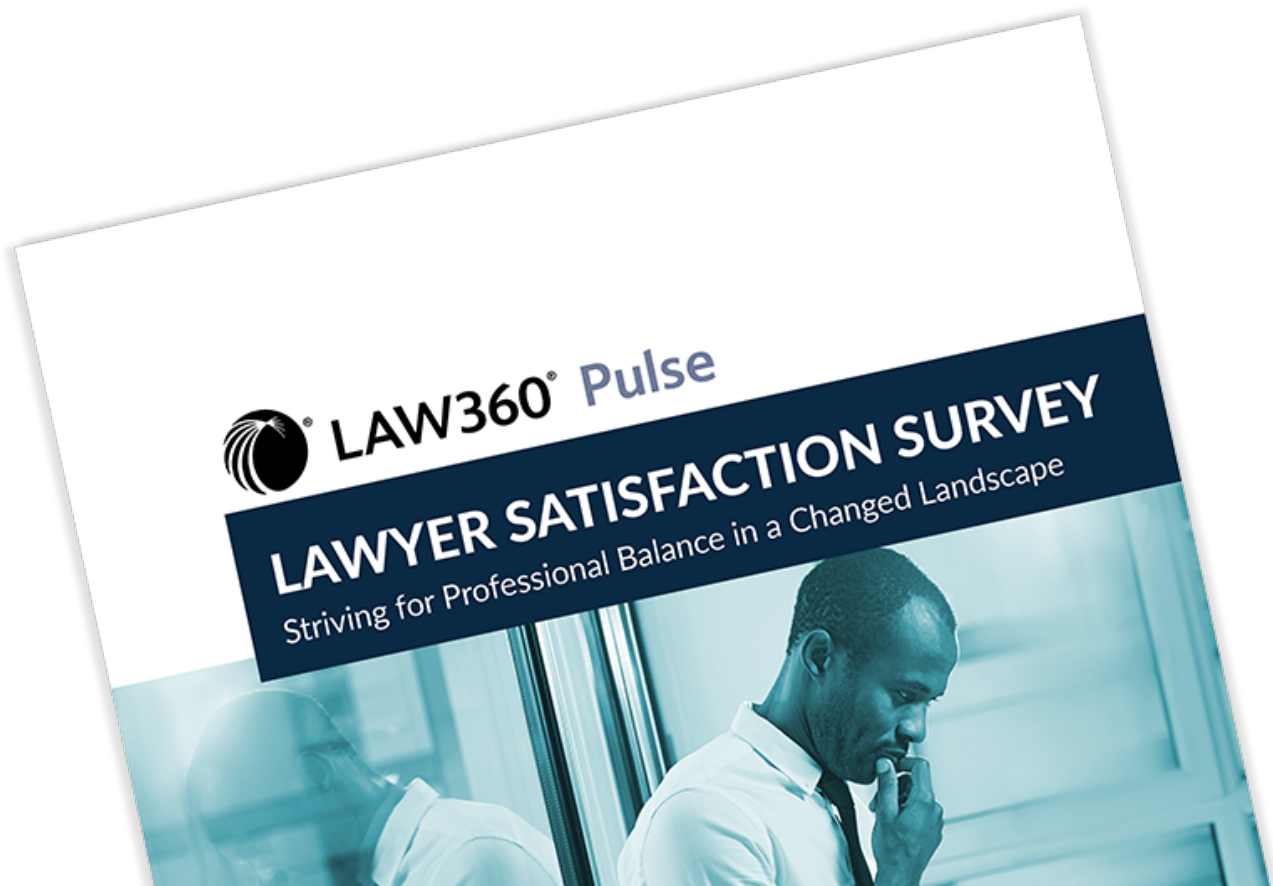
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"We have a tremendous atmosphere in our firm of transparency — partners really know what it takes to succeed in our law firm, they know what we're looking at in evaluating and rewarding them," Fisher Phillips chairman and managing partner Roger Quillen told Law360 Pulse. "We also have a reputation of being highly entrepreneurial and teaching that all the way down to the newest, lowest level, so our junior lawyers are encouraged to speak up and come forward with fresh ideas."

After Fisher Phillips, WilmerHale came in second and business law firm Honigman LLP took third place for the most satisfied workers in early 2022.

Honigman's chief human resources officer Jill Pace said in an email that the firm stresses diversity and inclusion, as well as community involvement through charity and pro bono work, to keep employees happy. The firm also has a free weekly mediation program and a platform called "Honigman RECOGNITION!" where birthdays and work milestones are celebrated and gifts can be exchanged.

The firm also provides all team members with customized summaries of their compensation and benefits to promote "high levels of participation, understanding and transparency."



Click here to read Law360 Pulse's full Lawyer Satisfaction Survey report.

"In an effort to ensure that we attract and retain high caliber talent, we continuously benchmark, obtain employee feedback, and perform market comparisons for our compensation and benefits programs," Pace said.

Husch Blackwell LLP, Latham & Watkins LLP and Spencer Fane LLP tied for fourth, according to Law360 Pulse's ranking of the firms with the most satisfied employees, followed by Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, Dickinson Wright PLLC, Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr LLP and McDermott Will & Emery LLP.

Pillsbury tries to have a "two-way communication" between firm leadership and employees, using surveys to give them "the voice and feeling like they've been heard," according to chief human resources officer Kathleen Pearson.

"Pillsbury has always had a culture that tries to ensure that our people understand what the thinking of the law firm is, what the strategy of the firm is, what the direction of it is, so that people can kind of get behind that common purpose," firmwide managing partner Ed Perron added.

McDermott chief people officer Teresa Clarke said the firm runs any new proposals by a committee of associates to get their feedback. McDermott also offers "mindfulness" credits toward billable hours and emphasizes career advancement, putting on more than 36 professional development programs in 2021 alone.

"We commit to investing in, training and developing you, creating networks and opportunities for you to pursue whatever your purpose and passion is, even if that might take you outside of the law firm world," Clarke said.

Saul Ewing has a chief talent officer and a director of professional development who works with attorneys of all levels. The firm even has a director of coaching and wellbeing who works with attorneys and staff solely "on themselves," said managing partner Jason St. John.

Saul Ewing has also prioritized listening to clients and attorneys in the two years since the pandemic began, according to St. John.

Last year Saul Ewing formed a working parents resource group that includes nonattorney staff. And Saul Ewing launched a "Saul-utions" challenge where staff collaborated on 88 ideas to better the firm, improve the lives of staff or bolster client service. The firm will soon vote on these proposals and hopes to implement as many of them as possible.

"For us the takeaway has been, 'people crave community,'" St. John said. "The greatest driver of dissatisfaction is people feeling like they're not listened to, and people feeling like they're not valued regardless of what their role is."

Latham & Watkins LLP partner Robin Hulshizer said leaders there encourage attorneys to thank staff and thinks the firm does an excellent job of ensuring all perspectives are heard.

"When there are hard decisions that have to be made, people feel like they have a voice," said Hulshizer, who participated in the survey. "We're definitely super flexible, and that is because of people sharing their concerns during the pandemic."

Fisher Phillips gave regional offices discretion over their response to the pandemic and actively worked with local leadership on how to keep people connected virtually.

"They allowed me as the regional managing partner to basically be responsive to the individual concerns and challenges that all of our lawyers and staff alike had to deal with," said Steven Nobil, Cleveland office managing partner. "Nobody has to wonder what we're doing or why we're doing it because the communication is incredible."

Husch Blackwell chief executive Paul Eberle said his firm also prioritizes transparency and flexibility amid the pandemic.

"We really let people pick the thing that works best for them, and also gave them the flexibility to change that if they needed it," Eberle said. "Trust and flexibility is really key to satisfaction."

Husch Blackwell partner Harvey Tettlebaum pointed to billable hour requirements that reasonably allow associates "to balance home and work life," along with the firm's subjective compensation process, 12 weeks paid maternity leave and "culture of collegiality."

"The firm is constantly seeking feedback and suggestions from staff, which it allows to be provided anonymously," said Tettlebaum, who also participated in the survey. "I have been with Husch Blackwell 42 years and would not even think about leaving, although I have had many opportunities to do so."

Fisher Phillips' own compensation system uses a shared credit approach that is intended to provide incentives to attorneys at any level.

"Every time you are asked to work on another lawyer's client, it is an opportunity to increase the credit you receive not for doing that work, but for developing a relationship with the client," said Ed Harold, regional managing partner of the firm's New Orleans office.

The Fisher Phillips system also encourages partners to involve junior attorneys in client matters because they won't lose their credit even if an associate becomes a client's go-to lawyer, according to Harold.

"The lack of an economic downside to the partner prevents some of the practices that diminish younger lawyer satisfaction, such as not being allowed to speak directly to a client or not getting the opportunity to work with one client enough to

learn its business," Harold said.

In addition to a national officer in charge of career development at the firm, Fisher Phillips has a committee dedicated to associate growth and retention.

"Law firms that consider junior lawyers to be fungible commodities who are there to just do mundane work will have a high level of dissatisfaction," Fisher Phillips chairman Quillen said. "People who think that their law firm management is not interested in what they have to say — or that they're not listened to — are also unhappy."

Fisher Phillips launched a cryptocurrency and blockchain task force last year at the suggestion of a junior attorney who now chairs that group. And the firm also created a team dedicated to sports at the suggestion of two other young attorneys. More junior staff also prompted the firm to create a "Future of Work" initiative.

"They're very, very responsive to other people's ideas," Nobil said.

The firm also stresses "personality and fit" when vetting prospective hires, according to Harold.

"We just don't have a lot of jerks and prima donnas," he said.

--Editing by Pamela Wilkinson, John Campbell and Kerry Benn. Graphics by Jason Mallory.

Methodology: Law360 Pulse conducted the Lawyer Satisfaction survey from Jan. 14 to Feb. 14, 2022. We received 1,209 responses from attorneys, of whom 154 were associates, 212 were nonequity partners, 550 were equity partners, 117 were of counsel at a private firm and 176 were either in-house counsel or government lawyers or held other positions. Among the participants, 36% were women and 60% were men. Three percent said they preferred not to disclose their gender. Some percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Others may exceed 100 percent because firms were allowed to select multiple responses. The survey was anonymous and will not connect any individual response with any person.