



Mindful Inspiration: How to Start a Well-being Movement for Your ACC Chapter

Skills and Professional Development



Top of the World Hike in Aliso Viejo and Laguna Beach, California, sponsored by the ACC Southern California Well-being Committee and one of its chapter sponsors, Shook Hardy Bacon.

Editor's note: This article was written before the coronavirus outbreak. Like all ACC Networks and Chapters, [ACC Southern California](#) has postponed all in-person events until the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or local governments recommend. In the meantime, join one of the Chapter's webcasts, and focus on your well-being (and your community's) by practicing social distancing.

It's likely you have heard by now that legal profession is falling short when it comes to well-being, and the in-house counsel cohort is no exception. Endless demands on our time from multiple directions and pressures to stay on top of everything are contributing to concentration challenges and sleep issues, as well as struggles with stress, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

So, you know this and may even be living these problems, but what attorney has time to focus on their well-being? In the world where you can barely get enough sleep (on good days!), who has the luxury of carving out time for wellness practices?

In our article "Say Yes to Well-being: How Daily Incremental Changes Can Transform our Lives" in the April 2020 issue of the *ACC Docket*, we offer practical tips and resources on how to create lifelong well-being for yourself, and provide suggestions on how your ACC chapter or legal department can launch a well-being program or committee. Knowledge is power, yet we still need a little push — some extra inspiration. Here's how [ACC Southern California Chapter](#) helps their members find peace of mind.

Creating the committee

In early 2019, two attorneys in the ACC Southern California Chapter, Jill Kalliomaa and Jeff Compangano — both passionate about health and wellness — became inspired to create an attorney well-being focus for their chapter. A few months later, their chapter formally launched the Attorney Well-being Committee to help its members find healthy ways to manage the stress inherent in the fast-paced in-house law practice.

Under the leadership of committee co-creators and co-chairs Kalliomaa and Compangano, the movement has seen strong support in its first year — now with over 25 active committee members. Their goal is to provide activities, information, and resources focused on managing stress, creating work-life balance, increasing resilience, and creating and maintaining an overall healthy lifestyle.

Resources and recent events

Well-being tip emails

The committee emails well-being tips to chapter members, such as, "Anytime you are feeling stressed, or like you have too much to do, just do this: for three breaths, breathe in and out slowly to the count of four in and four out. Then take five more slow breaths and notice how you feel. This mindfulness practice can be used anytime to ground yourself in the present moment and slow down." Simple, yet impactful.

It starts with the board

Kalliomaa led the ACC Southern California Chapter's board of directors in a mindfulness presentation and exercise at their all-day board retreat. Peter Macdonald, a board member and

executive vice president and general counsel at Loan Depot, was so moved by this presentation that he requested to have a similar presentation at his company's legal team meeting, which included personnel from around the country.

“Mind Over Matter: Mindfulness, Communication, and the Workplace”

The Attorney Well-being Committee's kick-off event in Costa Mesa, California, featured Leslie Wallis, partner at Ogletree Deakins, who presented on mindfulness and meditation and led the audience through two mindfulness exercises. Many participants commented that those exercises had made them feel calmer and more grounded.

“Managing Stress and Burnout in the Legal Profession”

In November 2019, the committee hosted a Competency Issues CLE at Snap Inc.'s offices in Santa Monica. The panel — consisting of in-house counsel, outside counsel, and a psychotherapist/leadership consultant who specializes in working with attorneys — discussed risk factors and shared personal stories and tips for reducing the likelihood of burnout.

In-house Counsel Conference

At the chapter's signature annual all-day CLE conference in Anaheim, Compangano and Kalliomaa started the afternoon session with an update from the Well-being Committee that included leading the attendees in a short mindfulness “body scan” practice. Is it possible to get a room full of attorneys to look away from their phones and laptops and experience a few quiet, peaceful moments together? Yes, it is!

Yoga class

In January 2020, they kicked off the New Year with good vibes by hosting a complimentary yoga class at Wanderlust, a popular members-only yoga club in Hollywood. Over 40 beginners and advanced yogis attended and enjoyed healthy post-workout smoothies.

“Top of the World” hike and coffee

The group gathered for an early morning hike that overlooked serene views of the Pacific Ocean and included healthy snacks and socializing with Shook Hardy & Bacon, the event's organizer and sponsor. Family and friends also joined this event, which will be a key component of events going forward.

The committee has exciting plans to grow in reach and scope of activities in the years to come and has recently added a mental and emotional well-being focus. For now, we hope you'll be inspired to start a well-being movement in your own ACC chapter or legal department.

Although Compangano and Kalliomaa continue to put in significant time and effort in leading and growing the committee, an important goal is to empower other members to lead well-being initiatives and — just as importantly — make well-being an ongoing part of their own lives.



Yoga Class at Wanderlust studio in Hollywood, California, sponsored by the ACC Southern California Well-being Committee.

Mindful inspiration

Now onto inspiration for your personal well-being journey. Because who has the time or energy for that? These incredibly busy in-house counsel are proof that *anyone* can fit wellness practices into their hectic schedules — but only if they commit to doing so.

Liz Gibson



Liz Gibson, vice president and deputy general counsel of product and legal risk support at Toyota Motor North America, is a great example of embracing a variety of practices that enhance her healthy lifestyle. Gibson's wellness practices allow her to thrive — and not just survive — at work and in her personal life. Her approach has transformed her high-stress job into a challenging and fun career, one in which her workday is not just the next day to the weekend, but an enjoyable way in and of itself to spend her precious time. Gibson's well-being practices, including exercise for physical/body well-being; priority time with family and friends; and mental peace, equanimity, and relaxation.

Regarding exercise, Gibson has been working out since she was in college. When her kids were young, a 30-minute daily walk was all she could manage. Now that her kids are out of the house, she has taken up competing in sprint triathlons, which keeps her motivated and gives her exercise routine a fun, competitive purpose.

On prioritizing time and leading a balanced life, Gibson's focus is showing up for the people in her life, especially during the hard times. Sometimes that means she needs to call a "time-out" at work and make the effort to focus her attention back at home.

For mental equanimity, she is a humble student of mindfulness meditation and has been meditating regularly since she was cajoled into the practice by a doctor about nine years ago. She has found mindfulness meditation to be one of the best ways to find balance and reduce stress. Understanding how her mind works helps put everything and anything in perspective.

It has been important to Gibson that she wakes up 30 minutes early every day to sit on her cushion and meditate. She has also been to several meditation retreats now, believing concentrated effort expedites the proven benefits of a meditation practice.

Jill Kalliomaa



GNF senior legal counsel Jill Kalliomaa has been practicing mindfulness and meditation for many years. In addition to experiencing a significant benefit in her response to stressful work situations, she has also seen great improvement in her general well-being and physical health, including decreased blood pressure and lowered levels of cortisol (the stress hormone).

Kalliomaa has attended many single and multi-day “silent” meditation retreats, including a nine-day retreat at the Joshua Tree Retreat Center in Yucca Valley, California. These retreats typically consist of silent sitting and walking meditation; guided “body scan” and “loving-kindness” self-compassion practice; yoga or other movement; and silent meals. Attendees are encouraged to take a break from all electronic devices, which results in a very peaceful and rejuvenating environment.

Kalliomaa incorporates mindfulness into her morning routine and lengthy commute. She also leads a weekly mindfulness group at her company as part of its “Energized for Life” program and is happy to share these practices with other attorneys who are interested in learning more.

In the past few years, Kalliomaa has started playing her flute again and is a member of a performance group at a local community college. She finds that being immersed in music with the other members of the organization is a great way to connect with others, relax, and truly be in the present moment.

To increase her physical activity level at work, Kalliomaa has added short high-intensity workouts and weight training at her company’s on-premises gym, in addition to frequent walks with colleagues (“walking meetings”) and stretching exercises in her office.

Jeff Compangano



Jeff Compangano, general counsel and vice president at Word & Brown Companies, has been committed to a healthy lifestyle for over 36 years. Compangano has always sought a holistic approach to health and wellness to improve physical and mental well-being and has seen great success in his own life, which fuels his passion to share his expertise with others.

He has also worked to learn about and incorporate mindfulness and meditation into his daily physical fitness regimen, which is where he learned of Kalliomaa's extensive knowledge in this area and has incorporated much of what she has taught him to further advance his overall well-being. In addition, Compangano has continued his focus on music for relaxation by learning a second instrument. In fact, watching the news is now less stressful if he is practicing guitar!

With a busy schedule as the lead counsel for his company, as well as teaching several classes at a local university, finding time is challenging for Compangano. Nevertheless, his strong commitment to well-being encourages him to fit in the fitness practices that he knows are so important to his well-being.

Compangano's fitness routine has a strong foundation of consistently making healthy eating choices (which includes advance planning), as well as daily exercise such as weight training, high-intensity workouts, kickboxing, and yoga. Membership in several national fitness chains makes it easy to always find a place to be active, even while on the road.

Final thoughts

At the end of the day, to be a good attorney, you must be a *healthy* attorney. There is no way around that. Start small — with yourself, and you may even be a seed of inspiration for your colleagues and others in our in-house industry. After all, it's easier to get and stay well in a supportive community.

Olesja Cormney



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Olesja Cormney is managing counsel in the labor and employment group for Toyota Motor North America, Inc., a mobility company headquartered in Plano, TX. She is a strategic counsel and a proactive problem solver, offering an innovative perspective and an agile approach based on her prior business experience. Cormney is honored to be on the board of the ACC Dallas Fort-Worth Chapter.

[Jill Kalliomaa](#)



Senior Legal Counsel

GNF in La Jolla, CA

Jill Kalliomaa is senior legal counsel for GNF in La Jolla, CA, a drug discovery research institute for Novartis Pharmaceuticals, one of the world's largest healthcare companies. Kalliomaa's practice has included contracts, compliance, and intellectual property, and she has broad experience in creating solutions and relationships for innovative industries including biotech and telecommunications. Kalliomaa has been serving on the ACC Southern California Chapter Board since 2016 and is a co-creator and co-chair of the chapter's newly formed attorney well-being committee.

[Jeffrey Compangano](#)



General Counsel and Vice President

Word & Brown Companies

Jeffrey Compangano is the general counsel and vice president for the Word & Brown Companies, a leading California provider in health insurance and benefits administration products. Compangano

manages all legal matters for his organization's corporate divisions, including complex contract negotiations, intellectual property, and mergers and acquisitions. He served on the board of the ACC Southern California Chapter from 2010 to 2016 and still remains active by participating on numerous committees and as a co-creator and co-chair of the chapter's newly formed attorney well-being committee.