Value Practice:

Legal Blog and Bi-weekly Calls to Help Enhance Communications and Cultivate Team Culture: Practices at National Investment Managers Inc.

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Executive Summary

National Investment Managers Inc.'s services include technical services relating to retirement plans. The company has grown through acquisitions, and the law department currently includes ten lawyers. The Chief Legal Officer (CLO) is the only attorney in the corporate headquarters office, and his practice focuses primarily on corporate issues for the company. The other nine lawyers on the in-house legal team are located across the United States; their practice focuses primarily on providing legal support on issues relating to ERISA and retirement plan counseling.

With the in-house lawyers located across the United States, the CLO has been looking for ways to improve communication, better leverage the talent of the legal team across the system and build a legal team that can provide the best service possible to the client in the most efficient manner. Since almost all of the in-house lawyers counsel corporate clients on ERISA and retirement planning issues, the CLO seeks ways to enhance consistency across the system and to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' for known solutions. A recent step to help address these objectives is the creation of a legal blog.

This ACC Value Practice piece outlines communications practices to help enhance efficiency and consistency across the legal department. In addition, this piece outlines some key attributes and hoped for benefits in creating a legal blog and its value to the legal department.

Bi-weekly Calls

The legal team holds bi-weekly calls to discuss unique issues, regulatory and legal changes, share solutions, and collaborate. The legal team has found tremendous value in these calls and the CLO shares that the client has experienced the benefits.

Specific successes include:

- Reducing research time
- Improving uniformity and consistency on important legal matters
- Identifying previously undiagnosed issues, and
- Proactively addressing new procedures from regulatory authorities

While the value in holding bi-weekly calls has been great, the CLO is interested in taking the next step to leverage knowledge and experience and in opening this communication vehicle to both in-house and outside counsel.

Legal Blog Hosted on the Company's Intranet

The CLO views the blog as a tool that will help the legal team be more productive and efficient.

Some key attributes of the legal blog:

- Hosted on the company's intranet
- Accessible only by the legal team
- Focus of the blog is ERISA and retirement plan matters given the substantive focus of the lawyers on the team
- Outside counsel with whom the company has a relationship and focuses on ERISA and retirement issues are invited to also participate on the blog
- Corporate IT personnel administer the blog

Benefits for outside counsel:

- Access to a group of in-house legal experts and other outside counsel who participate--to use as a sounding board
- Opportunity for enhanced understanding of the client's business

Benefits for in-house counsel:

- Established network to discuss legal issues
- Improved communication and collaboration
- Enhanced sense of teamwork by being 'linked' via the blog tool
- Improved relationship with outside counsel who participate
- Added perspective of all who participate on issues specific to legal practice

Blog is accessible only by lawyers

The blog is designed and structured to limit access to in-house lawyers and outside counsel. Business personnel cannot post or view blog entries.

The rationale for the closed legal design is to both serve as a tool for in-house counsel to collaborate and enhance efficiency, and also to continue to encourage business personnel to seek guidance from their local in-house counsel on legal issues.

Guidelines as part of the blog launch

The law department is developing guidelines, and plans to pilot the blog concept by focusing first on issues related to the retirement business. The CLO shares that the guidelines will instruct lawyers not to disclose names of clients or firms as part of their blog postings.

Tone at the Top

To help promote blog use, the CLO is encouraging the team to regularly visit the blog and post topics for discussion. In addition, the CLO plans to discuss and draw attention to the blog during bi-weekly calls.

Contact Information

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