

Human resources pros get a one-stop spot

Firm's interactive suite offers forms, online courses — and client savings

By: Douglas Levy in News Stories October 12, 2016

One of the state's largest law firms recently launched an online, all-in-one resource spot for its human resources clients.

Clark Hill PLC's HR/Advantage is a suite of interactive tools geared toward keeping HR professionals in the know about fast-changing trends in employment and benefits law.



It includes a library of common workplace documents, compliance toolkits to assist with adherence to regulations such as the Fair Labor Standards Act and Family and Medical Leave Act, and a catalog of in-person or online training for employees and/or HR management.

In addition, e-learning courses are offered via an online portal, with participation via desktop computers or mobile devices.

And best of all for the client, legal costs are saved by using HR/Advantage.

Paul W. Boehms, who is the practice group director of Clark Hill's Labor & Employment Group, said the HR/Advantage idea came last year during a group session at the firm's annual firm retreat.

"One of the things that came out of it was an idea around a products initiative," he said. "Things we could package together using the lawyers' experience of the most common things they're seeing, but knowing that a lot of things don't necessarily tie to the billable hour."

He said the group then put some services together that "are simpler, easier to understand, a lot more digestible to the client and especially geared toward predictable fees. It started from there and evolved over time."

Carly E. Osadetz, an associate in the practice group, said a lot of HR-related matters the firm deals with involve preventative measures and "practical, day-to-day running of the HR function. Sometimes that doesn't lend itself well to the traditional bill-by-the-hour model."

She added that labor and employment law is one of the most heavily regulated areas.

"It seems to be increasingly regulated over the last couple of years, especially with things such as the FMLA" or the Americans with Disabilities Act, Osadetz said. "The (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) and other government agencies are constantly changing their interpretations of the law or issuing new regulation that have that practical effect on HR departments. They have a hard time keeping up sometimes."

While HR/Advantage serves as an all-in-one resource, Boehms said in no way does it put distance in the attorney/client relationship.

"I think this draws us closer," he said. "We want to be a trusted advisor and provide resources to help the clients in their day-to-day. None of this replaces good legal advice. What it does is simply packages it ... in an effective way.

"We're trying to find multiple ways to interact with the client and maybe just not via the box we'd normally put them in."

Osadetz agreed, saying an attorney/client relationship is still needed, especially in more complex situations such as audits or litigation.

HR/Advantage is an online-accessible source for now; there is not a smartphone app, but e-learning can be done on any device.

And e-learning sessions are the one thing clients most want, Boehms said.

“When we started this a year ago, we put up on a chalkboard the things we thought we were going to prioritize, what we thought we were going to do,” he said. “After talking with clients about it, we changed quite a bit. That’s how the e-learning program came about.”

He explained that the group started with a traditional training model, where a brown-bag lunch series and live trainings would be the highlight.

“But as we talked to clients, everybody was asking for e-learning,” Boehms said. “We pivoted, adjusted and adapted quickly. I’d expect that will continue to happen as people get familiar with this. We want the clients to dictate where we go next.”

HR/Advantage currently has an e-learning course suitable for all employees on determining workplace harassment and retaliation. In addition, the firm has put together an anti-workplace violence course with a Michigan-based retired FBI agent who specializes in workplace security and threat assessment.

The firm also has the ability to customize e-learning to include state-specific regulations and policies applicable to clients, as Clark Hill — which ranked 7th in Michigan Lawyers Weekly’s “Largest Law Firms 2016” list — has clients nationwide as well as offices in seven states besides Michigan.

And, to make sure employees are following along, an online service allows for HR clients to track who in the company has completed the e-learning sessions.

“In fact,” Osadetz said, “our own HR department likes it so much, all the internal Clark Hill people are going through it as well.”

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