

The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel®

www.metrocorpcounsel.com

Volume 16, No. 8

© 2008 The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel, Inc.

August 2008

How To Qualify As “One Of The Best Companies To Work For In America”

The Editor interviews Patrick C. Dunican, Jr., Chairman and Managing Director of Gibbons P.C.

Gibbons P.C., a 230-attorney law firm headquartered in Newark, NJ, with additional offices in New York, Philadelphia, Trenton, and Wilmington, DE, has just been named one of the “25 Best Medium-Size Companies to Work for in America” by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Great Place to Work Institute. Winners were announced on June 23, 2008, at the 60th Annual SHRM Conference and Exposition in Chicago. Gibbons was the only New Jersey-based company and the only law firm to receive this award; the firm was featured along with the other winners in the July issue of HR Magazine.

Editor: The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) award is the latest in a series of honors Gibbons has received for being a “great place to work.” What was the nomination process? How did the organization determine its best companies list?

Dunican: Yes, the SHRM award seems to be part of a trend, happily for us! The most recent rankings by *Working Mother* magazine placed us among the “Top 50 Law Firms for Women” in the nation, singling out Gibbons for being one of the firms with the lowest female attorney attrition rate. *MultiCultural Law* magazine has consistently ranked us one of the top 100 firms nationwide for diversity. Locally, we have been named among the Best Places to Work in New Jersey and



Patrick C. Dunican, Jr.

Pennsylvania by such publications as *NJBIZ*, the *Central Penn Business Journal* and *Philadelphia Business Journal*.

The recognition from SHRM, though, is particularly gratifying because it is a national award that was prepared by the same group that publishes the *FORTUNE* “100 Best Companies to Work for” list. Gibbons is the only ranked law firm and the only ranked New Jersey company on the list. SHRM is the pre-eminent human resources organization in the country – a professional association whose entire focus is human resources, benefits, employee relations, and the workplace experience – so this evaluation carries extra weight and validity.

SHRM executed a comprehensive, quantitative survey process to determine their winning list. The process included a random survey of 300 employees on various aspects of the Gibbons employment

experience, which accounted for 2/3 of the overall score, in addition to a 57-question employer survey on our workplace, benefits, and culture. We also had the opportunity to submit supporting collateral materials on the firm as a workplace, which, given our recent history of recognition, certainly added to our profile and helped greatly in our selection.

Editor: Gibbons was the only law firm and only New Jersey company on this list of recognized companies. What factors make your firm a standout among law firms?

Dunican: It really does seem as if everyone at Gibbons agrees that when you work here, you are part of an extended family. This institutional attitude is encouraged and demonstrated from the top down; directors (partners) and associates, professional and support staff, full-time and part-time employees alike all feel as if they have something of an ownership stake in the Gibbons name and even a duty to live up to the example of our name partner and standard-bearer, John Gibbons, the retired Chief Justice of the U.S. Court of Appeals, Third Circuit, and a nationally renowned leader in public interest and constitutional law. I think this is unique among law firms, this kinship, enthusiasm, and pride that we have been able to generate and sustain. We also leverage this vested interest in the Gibbons name by branding those very efforts that do make us stand apart from other firms.

The starting points for any consideration of Gibbons as a great place to work, and major sources of this enthusiasm, are

Please email the interviewee at pdunican@gibbonslaw.com with questions about this interview.

our innovative and unique benefits and personnel policies, which we have dubbed the “Gibbons Experience,” in conjunction with our ongoing professional training, development, and three-tier mentoring platform, “Gibbons Academy.” We are also mindful of the advantages of recruiting, nurturing, and advancing a diverse workforce, which we achieve through the “Gibbons Women’s Initiative” and the “Gibbons Diversity Initiative.” Gibbons employees are understandably excited about all the professional and personal opportunities extended to them through these programs.

They are equally excited about the firm’s outreach beyond our own offices. “Gibbons Cares” is the collective designation of our charitable and pro bono platform, an umbrella that also covers our celebrated, longstanding “Gibbons Fellowship,” through which the firm undertakes public interest and constitutional law projects and litigation on a pro bono basis. The Fellowship augments, but does not supplant, the other pro bono activities and community outreach we undertake through “Gibbons Cares,” which include annual donations of more than \$1 million and extensive pro bono and volunteer service, all in support of those communities where we have offices. We even recently launched a firmwide sustainability initiative, “Gibbons Goes Green.” The people who work at Gibbons are justifiably proud of this outreach.

Editor: The benefits package your firm offers may be the principal reason the firm is consistently recognized as a great place to work. What are some of the features of your benefits package? Are some of your benefits structured to attract and retain specific groups of employees – for example, working mothers?

Dunican: The “Gibbons Experience” is the generous benefits program through which the firm provides something for everyone, to make each employee feel his or her experience at Gibbons is unique and special. Each employee is different, and the “Gibbons Experience” addresses some of their individual needs that go beyond traditional benefits.

For example, after parental leave, an

attorney can opt to return to work, first on a 60 percent basis of the hours expected of a full-time attorney, and after one year on an 80 percent basis for an indefinite period of time. These policies do not affect an attorney’s ability to be promoted. In fact, in 2006 the firm promoted two part-time attorneys to the posts of Director and Counsel. Additionally, Gibbons supports an emergency child care program, paying 85 percent of the cost for this service, while employees pay only the remaining 15 percent for any day it is used.

Gibbons also helps our professionals achieve work/life balance through technology initiatives that provide the flexibility to work remotely as necessary. Though the firm has always adapted to new technologies, upon moving to our brand new Newark headquarters in 2007, we implemented state-of-the-art systems that support a truly mobile workforce – allowing employees to connect seamlessly to the firm’s network and all other technology capabilities, whether they are in courthouses, client meetings, or home offices. One application allows employees to have calls automatically forwarded to their mobile phones, PDAs, home phones, or even other locations. In addition, Gibbons outfits personnel with laptops, or with the appropriate software for their home desktop computers, to enable remote access to the firm’s entire network, replicating the employee’s office desktop at home. This allows for increased client communications, with attorneys being reachable from a variety of locations, and also creates the flexibility needed to assist in work/life balance.

While our traditional benefits are extremely competitive – health, dental, life, and disability insurance; paid vacation and personal days; 401(k) and profit-sharing, among many others – our custom, value-added perks set us apart. Some are geared toward the health conscious, such as our Weight Watchers and Smokenders programs, our annual Health Fair and flu shots, and CPR and First Aid training. Others recognize long-time employees, including the “Anniversary Day Off” and the “20+ Club.” Corporate partners sponsor mortgage, insurance, and health advocate programs for Gibbons employees and provide numerous other corporate perks. Celebrations include early dismissal before

holidays; floating holidays that recognize the diversity of our workforce; our December Family Day; and our traditional St. Patrick’s Day festivities. In case that is not enough, employees can also drink Starbucks coffee all day long, for free.

Editor: Has being recognized as a great place to work helped you attract high caliber talent?

Dunican: We have definitely noticed an increase in resumes from exceptionally qualified employees over the past few years, which could certainly be due in part to our “Great Place to Work” recognition. Many new employees have mentioned our “reputation” as one of the reasons they wanted to join the firm.

Editor: How does being a great place to work help Gibbons be a great law firm for clients and help your bottom line?

Dunican: The better an employer we are, the better quality of employee we attract, and the better productivity we encourage among our employees, which in turn makes us a better law firm to our clients. First and foremost, a satisfied employee is more likely to deliver excellent client service than is an unsatisfied employee; someone who is happy to be part of the firm is more likely to be loyal to the firm and as such take more seriously the charge to maintain the high quality of the firm’s work and profile. A satisfied employee is also less likely to leave the firm; a great employer has much lower employee attrition, which means less turnover and more continuity for our clients’ matters, as well as cost savings because project transitions are unnecessary.

We also recognize that what is good for the individual employee is often good for the firm and for the client. For example, our training and mentoring platform, Gibbons Academy, as well as our Diversity and Women’s Initiatives, are all designed to promote the careers of our attorneys by imparting numerous tools to strengthen their practices. In strengthening their practices, we are not only helping them advance their careers, we are giving them added knowledge, insight, and skill that they in turn apply to the work they do on behalf of our clients.