

Aadvo – law office

Inspiration from Romania



Age
Management
Masterclass

Company

Aadvo - law office

An interview with Mrs. Alina Ailenei, the owner

Sector

Tertiary: service industry - law

Specialization

Law office is operating in:

Corporate & commercial (including arbitration and dispute resolution);

Employment & labor law;

Tax, fiscal & banking;

EU law & environmental (including authorizations & permits obtaining);

IT&C law;

Real estate & construction.

11 lawyers and expert collaborators represent the core team of the office.

<http://www.aadvo.ro/>

Age management dimension

Learning, training and lifelong learning:

- the absence of age limits in determining access to in-house learning and training opportunities;
- special efforts to motivate learners, establish methodologies and provide support;
- defining training opportunities as being an integral part of career planning and not solely as job;
- organizing work so that it is conducive to learning and development – for instance, within the framework of mixed-age teams and groups;

- using older employees and their particular qualifications both as facilitators of further education for older and younger employees, and as an organizational 'knowledge pool'.

Flexible work time practices:

- the adjustment of shift schedules;
- special measures of daily or weekly working hours reduction.

Health protection & promotion:

- health-promoting working time arrangements (see also 'Flexible working time practices');
- ergonomic workplace (re)design.

Job recruitment:

- explicitly targeting older retired applicants who can still work.

Expected result

The internal program & policy is named AdvoCare. The main aim for the program was to create a real protection and sustainment for the employees in order to increase their:

1. expertise and proficiency;
2. loyalty to the firm;
3. personal and professional wellbeing.

Main motives for the decision to implement the age management measures

One of the first motives that come into my mind is a personal one, emotionally issued. At the beginning of my career, I was first an employee. And unfortunately, all my bosses were time abusive and highly demanding without considering me as a person and my needs, my health. Situations like daily working extra hours without being paid, of course, never recognizing personal efforts of the employee and always blaming him/her, no vision on teamwork and the role of a leader, made me promise myself that if ever getting in the same shoes I'll never do the same to my own employees.

So as an entrepreneur, when I considered making my team of lawyers and experts, I spent a lot of time thinking on the aspects related with their needs as workers and how should I approach this personnel management in a way that will make them more confident, productive and – why not – happy and pleased with their work and their working place.

The second important reason is my personal view on how a community should function. Every individual has his own needs and ignoring them or just simply placing them outside my work perspective would be selfish and unproductive in the long term. If you want a nice and *feel good* environment you need to take care of each element, starting with the people and not the business purpose or focusing on achieving mainly results (financials).

The measures taken for my office are not considering only the age as important but they are addressing the wider age range and the needs – they aim at all the people we are getting in contact with!

Our way towards the age management

After a long period of hard working and ignoring personal life, after the euphoria of finally getting with the work experience to a point of proficiency, I realized that somehow it would be good to consider some personal life for myself too. So, I thought I should buy my time by splitting my money and decided to develop my company. This implied adding people to my team. I had to consider at that point recruitment, employee policies and investments for those employees.

I took all those decisions from a very personal perspective, more precisely, every time I wanted something implemented or done, I thought on how I would feel if I would be that employee. Thus I ended up with Advo-care, our own employee management policy, which is still an open and always updating procedure.

The most significant aspects, implemented since the beginning are:

- Flexible working hours: any duty that was not an emergency, could always be done from anywhere and within the time limit pre-agreed with the employee. Any non-planned need for absence from work (without any need of justification required) was accepted, considering respecting the fulfillment of the duty in the pre-agreed timing. Our work involves also visits to the clients, attending court sessions, meeting various authorities – and the time to attend to all these tasks is always considered working time. Vacation time is always agreed by the employees only. The only requirement is that at least one person remains available at the office and if the employees all needed to go in a certain period of time, the manager will be the one fulfilling such requirement.
- Learning training and lifelong learning: when the office was started, the recruitment process did not include previous experience in the field as mandatory. The most important was the person and the personal engagement, personal resources and the will to learn/develop/do things. Therefore, after employment, an essential dimension of office work was training on the spot by adapting the learning and training process to the needs of the learner and the requirements of the job. This was quite an intensive process for the whole first year of job, for all the employees: from basic drafting of legal documents to approaching the client and his needs, approaching judges and authorities and working with colleagues as a team (organizing your work following the same rules as everyone so that you could be backed up anytime). Another dimension of continuous learning is offering specific specialization courses/training/workshops/conferences to the employees held outside the office. This is also very flexible – there is no budget limit fixed for these activities (considering the proportion of general profits of the company), the only criteria are the relevance, importance and need for it.

Later significant add-ons on the AdvoCare are:

- The company pays private health care insurance for all employees and their children (Health protection, workplace design). Keeping my employees healthy is extremely important, considering not only productivity but the internal organization of the team. Therefore, it is important that any health issue is dealt with efficiently and fast.
- Recruiting retired people. This idea has become attractive in later years, considering that I needed persons with medium/high level of qualification in the administrative and supporting branch of the office. Considering retired people that are still active as a primary resource was a brilliant idea and saved us a lot of time invested in finding and training the persons we were looking for. In this way, we found them quickly and now they are bringing a lot of added value for the company!

Strengths and weaknesses of the chosen approach

Flexible working hours

- Strengths: increased productivity, increased team bounds (they need to synchronize, they talk to each other more, they rely on each other), increased personal confidence and engagement in the working time
- Weaknesses: lack of predictability for mid and long term activities in the office (but this does not affect the overall tasks because they always depend on each other)

Learning, training

- Strengths: they work as they were trained and they completely understand the working process approached by the office, increased efficiency, increased independency to fulfill complete jobs for specific clients (they only need supervision in exceptional cases)
- Weaknesses: it takes a long time to achieve a complete training process (in our case, minimum 1 year); there is no guarantee that an employee, once trained won't leave and you will not also benefit from the long training period.

Health protection

- Strengths: healthier and happier employees, loyalty
- Weaknesses: costs that are not reflected directly in the work

Hiring retired persons

- Strengths: these persons are already trained and have a huge experience. The company benefits from it directly without actually making investments. Also, these employees are valuable for the company as they bring diversity and inclusion. There are other personal benefits for them, at personal level, which makes us really proud and happy as a company.
- Weaknesses: you cannot rely on extended years of work for them, so you constantly need to have a backup solution.

“Aha” moment

I consider myself a good employer since only one person left the office in 18 years of activity and that was for personal reasons. I think, if I focus on results and the loyalty of my employees, the right conclusion is that I'm a good employer. I have a moment of personal satisfaction each time we succeed to help a client because if you like what you do, every effect of your working makes you happy and satisfied. A personal satisfaction moment in terms of my relation with the employees, well, every time I see in the documents they create and produce or in their speech towards a client or a judge and I recognize things that I taught them and I insisted on, then this is one of the moment when I feel proud of them and also satisfied with my work.

How did I arrive at the great idea of employing retired people?

Again, the personal reasons were the first ones. I thought about my mother, about the fact that her not having an occupation, a professional work getting done or requested to do, makes her more vulnerable and more, well, sometimes annoying to others. And I realized that if she has something to do (because, at some point I asked for her help in my personal life), she was a nicer person and she was efficient, because I had to explain to her what she needs to do in a

patient way and why I needed her to focus on details. She had these qualities already there, naturally, because of her experience of a lifetime. I also thought that a retired person, somehow, has more patience in approaching the task he/she has to solve. I think they are not so preoccupied with what the others think of the reaction of the other persons they work with. They get more involved in the job than why they have to do it!

Activities to sustain this initiative

The AdvoCare is sustained first by me as owner and initiator of the policy and second by the team itself. We successfully implemented the flexible program with the shared contribution of everybody and now this is self-sustained. The in-office training is also a permanent approach in the company, as the things are constantly changing and the issues for the clients are wide and sometimes complex, requiring people to team-up and work together. Also, it becomes a natural specialization within the team that certain people handle certain clients and thus, they become experts in the issues related to that client. Each time another member of the team needs advice and counseling for a similar issue, they directly address the expert.

The private health insurances are sustained from the profits of the company and I consider definitely keeping them in the long run as they bring a significant benefit for the employees' satisfaction, loyalty and wellbeing.

Monitoring system of the effects

In the early years of the implementation for the AdvoCare program, observing each day the way things were at the office and between employees, helped me consider the first effects in my approach. Direct feed-back of the team concerning the flexible working time or in-office training was also the main monitoring tool. Therefore, we got the habit of speaking up our issues, fears, problems, issues as early as possible, in order to understand and find appropriate solutions.

In recent years, the general policy in the office is to have weekly informal meetings. This helps us meet and talk outside the tasks and jobs we have for the clients and gives a very good feed-back on how things are going on and how the morale of each person is, each week.

I am considering for the future and in case the company will eventually extend (even if I am not considering this alternative yet, because it's part of our concept to keep it small but high quality), introducing some periodic surveys and questionnaires in order to measure some factors that may become good indicators for the efficiency of AdvoCare program. I am also considering creating an anonymous post-box, to create a safe, secure and anonymous way for the employees to send me messages/things/issues/complaints without having the fear that they will be judged somehow. I consider that there may be issues that cannot be discussed with many others or even there may be things that employees don't want to tell me directly.

Beneficial effects of the initiative

First of all, I can say that I am surrounded by happier and satisfied people at work, which is a huge gain and a great comfort for me, as an employer. They are not like that only at professional level, but also at personal level.

We have our weekly informal meetings where we just talk about ourselves and how we are generally with life and I am sure that my employees, at this time, are happy with working here and with how they are integrated in this office.

I know that it sounds cliché, but truly, when employees feel good at work, then be sure that their productivity and their quality of work increases.

Also I can rely on them, I am not worried at any time that they would leave the company and I am sure about the team and the way we organized our team is highly functional and harmonious.

Personal recommendation

For me, becoming an entrepreneur was not a question of just making money. At that point I considered myself in relation with society, community, people I am employing and become responsible for, work related values to promote and to respect. Therefore, I would recommend to anyone wishing to become an entrepreneur and eventually an employer, to consider this role from a deeper perspective: the destiny of some people may be in your hands and it's up to you to consider the wellbeing, the happiness and the satisfaction of those persons as your workers. Romanian entrepreneurs need to exercise

Always think about your employees, from your own perspective. Think that if you would be the employee, how you would like the other one treating you.

Do you think that Romanian employers are considering age in their employment management policies or if they don't, are they prepared to consider such a policy as age management? I am asking this because you are a legal advisor of other companies.

I don't think they are at that point yet. But since they all complain about the lack of working force, so they are all focusing now on finding new sources of employees, soon they will be open to consider the older persons coming back to work and the advantages that working with an older person will give.

Are there still aspects that need to be embedded in the employers' policies for employees? The issues, related with the rights of the employees and the care for the employees, are taking a lot of your job time as legal? How often do you confront such problems?

The situations, when the employees do something wrong, are actually more frequent. The law and the legislation in Romania actually set things quite straight and quite precise in terms of the rights for the employees. It's a very strict regulation and does not allow you to not respect it. The only problem is that most of the employees don't know their rights and they don't go to the justice to ask for their rights to be respected. If the employees are educated enough to know that they have rights, the employer always follows the legislation. When they see that the employees are not informed or keen in getting their rights recognized and respected, it's only then when they are not respecting the employees' rights.

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Credits:

Aadvo – law office

Alina Ailenei, the owner

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