Cleary Launches New Feedback App for Associates

By Meghan Tribe
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As law firms work to develop new systems to coach and mentor their junior talent, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton has launched an app that puts its associates in the driver's seat and allows them to push for feedback when they want it.
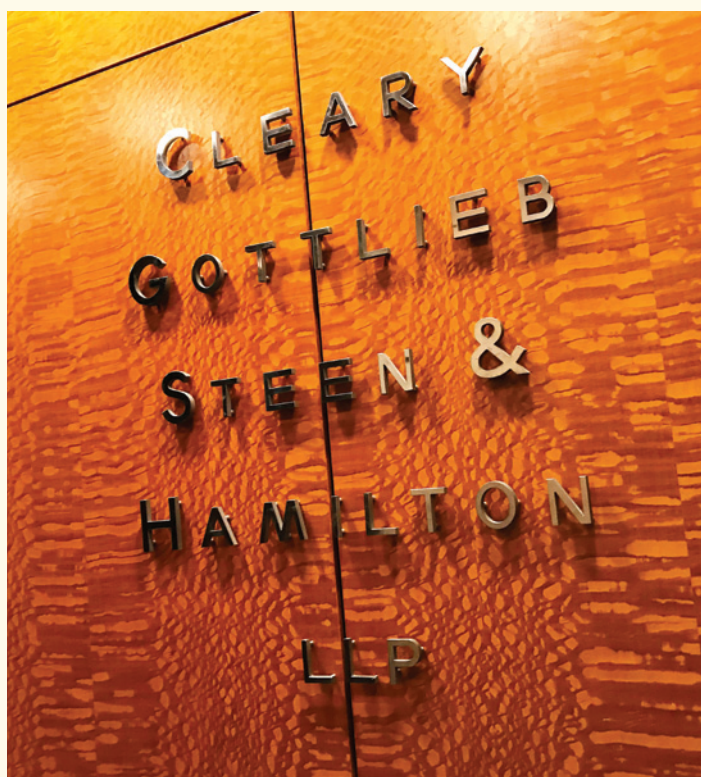
ClearyLoop is a tech-based platform that allows associates to request an informal feedback session with senior lawyers from an app located on their desk site. The app, which was launched earlier this month in its New York office, then blocks out time for these sessions on the lawyers' respective calendars.

The idea for ClearyLoop, which will be launched on a wider scale across the firm in 2019, was actually first developed by a team of associates earlier this year as a part of a hackathon sponsored by the firm.

"[We wanted] to get groups of associates to think about solving a problem or something that we all wanted to see improvement on at the firm," said litigation partner Carmine Boccuzzi Jr., who chairs the firm's associate committee.

"And we focused on the issue [of] how to improve the delivery of clear, actionable, real-time feedback from senior lawyers to associates at the firm."

Beginning in March, six teams of associates and other lawyers worked to come up with ideas to improve feedback across populations at the firm. They then presented their ideas in a shark-tank style forum to the senior leadership at the firm who selected a winner with the promise that they would work to implement the winning idea.

After selecting ClearyLoop, the firm then worked to build the proposed platform alongside its human resources and IT departments.

While the goal was to create something that reflected the vision of the winning team, the firm also wanted to ensure that it reflected some of the practicalities and realities at the firm to increase the chances that it would be something that was going to be used by its attorneys, said Cleary bankruptcy and restructuring partner Jane VanLare, who led the subcommittee to develop ClearyLoop.

"Ultimately, our goal was to facilitate informal feedback and that's what was driving this whole process," she said. "We all think that's something that's extremely important and embracing the 21st century with an app that made this easier."

For junior lawyers, the context and medium through which they could request feedback was incredibly important, perhaps more important than some of its senior partners realized, VanLare said.

Associates have grown up using this kind of technology and have interacted with it in various aspects of their lives, so it was important for the firm to reflect the way associates found it easiest and most convenient to try and solicit feedback, she added.

Over the next year, Cleary will roll out Cleary-Loop to its various offices, adapting it as it goes along. The firm will also track and gather data about how often its attorneys are using the app, with the hope that its use becomes second nature.

In a Big Law environment, it can be difficult to engage the whole firm on issues like feedback, said Francesca Odell, a member of Cleary's executive committee who spearheaded the Hackathon.

But through the development of ClearyLoop, the firm was able to experiment with new ideas and try different approaches while promoting communication and engagement across all populations at the Am Law firm, especially its youngest talent.

"Our hope is this begins a much broader dialogue about feedback, but also about how we can use tools like this to pull together areas of the firm where associates have views and want to be involved in how we manage things," Odell said.

Meghan Tribe is a reporter covering the changing face of Big Law, from lateral moves and work-from-home programs to diversity initiatives. Contact her at mtribe@alm.com. On Twitter: @TribeMeghan