

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

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As America grapples with systemic racial injustice, here's how one corporate law firm thinks about being 'part of the change'



JEREMY NOBILE



Finance/Legal

Contributed photo

Benesch managing
partner Gregg
Eisenberg.

The managing partner for Cleveland-based Benesch laid out some plans under consideration for the corporate law firm in a June 8 email to staff viewed by Crain's, including increasing billable credit for pro-bono work dealing with issues of racial justice, eradicating systemic racism, and addressing police brutality and police-community relations.

Inspired by ongoing protests against police brutality and systemic racism, many businesses, sports teams and other organizations are sensing a pivotal moment to articulate how they intend to [be the change they wish to see in the world](#).

In a June 8 email to staff seen by Crain's, Gregg Eisenberg, managing partner for Cleveland-based [Benesch](#), one of the [largest law firms in Northeast Ohio](#) (by number of in-market attorneys), discussed how he wants to position the corporate law firm to "be part of the change."

That includes several practical developments under consideration, including increasing billable credit for pro-bono work dealing with issues of racial justice and instituting a firm match for contributions to organizations promoting racial justice, human rights and equality.

"As individuals and collectively as a team," Eisenberg said, "we must be part of the change."

Here's the full email from Eisenberg:

TO: All Benesch

FROM: Gregg Eisenberg

DATE: Monday, June 8, 2020

RE: Be Benesch. Be Part of the Change.

Time and again throughout our history we have witnessed discrimination and racial injustices. While racial injustice has no place in our society, it unfortunately continues to occur. With that in mind, it is understandable that the most recent events have unearthed deep-seated feelings of anger and frustration.

Over the past two weeks, myself and many of our leaders have struggled to find the words to adequately express our feelings around this matter. Rather, we have been taking time to reflect on our own emotions and actions. We have been watching and listening throughout the Firm so we can better educate ourselves and determine what we can do that is going to be impactful and really make a difference.

What I can tell you is that Benesch has always had a commitment to diversity and inclusion throughout all levels of our Firm. First and foremost, it is the right thing to do and our Firm was founded on these principles, and it has been memorialized in our Strategic Plan. Additionally, we have zero tolerance for discrimination or hatred in any form at Benesch. We take this commitment and stance seriously and we must all be mindful of this and continue to improve our efforts daily.

As individuals and collectively as a team, we must be part of the change. Based on the many conversations I've had over the past week or two, I am pleased and proud to say that I know many of you agree with this statement. I am overwhelmed by the outreach that I have received from many of you to share suggestions on what Benesch can do to make a difference and I want to thank those of you who had the courage to speak out on this important issue — that is exactly the type of Firm that we have strived to create. And, I appreciate the leadership demonstrated from our various committees around this as well. I want you to know that Benesch is committed to be part of the change.

There are several considerations currently under review that I would like to share with you which I am confident will be a step in the right direction and am hopeful will have meaningful impact in our communities. Some of the considerations currently being reviewed are to:

- Increase available firm billable credit for pro-bono work aimed at achieving racial justice, eradicating systemic racism, addressing police brutality and police-community relations;
- Institute a firm match for contributions to community organizations that promote racial justice, human rights and equality, and work to eradicate systemic racism, and/or address

police brutality and police-community relations;

- Offer programming to the Benesch team that provides a virtual space to acknowledge how we are all doing and allow us to connect around sharing concerns; and
- Develop pages on our internal and external websites to share resources that can provide value to our team and our clients.

We are working to finalize details around these items and will share additional information in the near future. In the meantime, I would like to share with you some suggestions of what you can personally do right now:

- Join me at noon EST on Tuesday, June 9, for 8 minutes and 46 seconds of silence in memoriam of George Floyd — the same amount of time that police had a knee on Mr. Floyd's neck;
- Reach out to your clients and fellow colleagues to see how they are doing in light of this social crisis and to show that you care. This is a great opportunity to further your relationships with not only your clients, but your Benesch teammates as well;
- Take some time for yourself. We acknowledge that there is much anger, frustration, nervousness and fear, and these feelings are absolutely justified. If you need to unplug and focus on yourself, it's okay to do just that; and
- Utilize the various mental health resources available as part of our Employee Assistance Program.

Above all else, realize that Benesch is a place for safe dialogue. We are a family and each and every one of us is important. We stand united at all times against racism, violence and discrimination in all forms and we fully recognize that we play an important role in this conversation. If you have additional ideas of how we can make a positive impact in eliminating racial injustice, please share your suggestions with me or any other member of the leadership team. We are listening and we are committed to be part of the change.

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Inline Play

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