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SuperVision...a tool for supervisors >

Executive Summary:

A new legal app can't shout "Objection!" in a courtroom, but it can help human resource managers decide if they should consult an attorney.

By Randy Walker

iPhones can navigate maps, make hotel reservations, and help tune guitars. Now they can even provide legal information.

While not a substitute for a lawyer, Spilman Thomas & Battle's new SuperVision app

offers tutoring on employment and labor questions. Targeted to corporate executives, general counsel, business owners and human resource professionals, it will be most useful to "all levels of HR from executives on down," says Eric Iskra, chair of Spilman's labor and employment practice group.

Spilman's chief innovation officer, Skip Lineberg, came up with the idea, according to Iskra, who is based at Spilman's Charleston, W.Va., headquarters. The firm's lawyers authored the content. A beta (trial) version was released in January. Version 1.0.1 was launched in July. Apple users can find it in the Apple app store by searching for "supervision" or "Spilman." Several hundred copies have been downloaded since January, according to Tiffany Fridley, Spilman marketing specialist.

Once SuperVision is downloaded, wireless access is not needed. The free app runs on iPhones and iPads. An Android version is not yet available. Non-Apple users can access the program on Spilman's website, www.spilmanlaw.com.

SuperVision will be updated periodically to reflect changes in the law. Users will be automatically notified when updates are available.

King Tower, in the Roanoke office, leads Spilman's labor and employment practice in Virginia. "In labor and employment law there are issues you have to consult an attorney for, but the most effective way to use those legal resources is to be as well versed as you can be about human resource and legal issues in advance," he says. "For years we've done seminars for HR executives that deal with these issues, but we decided to use this technology. It's a decision-tree model of how you can analyze some common employment law issues."

The welcome screen lists three HR situations: a salaried employee who is asking for overtime pay; an employee who's leaving and needs to be paid final wages; and an employee who is complaining on social media. Additional scenarios will be added, Tower says.

An example: clicking on "Salaried but asking for overtime pay" brings up an explanation of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The "next" button leads to a question: "Does the employee spend more than 80% of her time in the management of a permanent department/office or unit of the employer?" Clicking "yes" brings up another question: "Does the employee supervise two or more full-time employees?" Examples of supervisory functions are given. Clicking on "yes" brings up the result: "Executive exemption applies... Therefore, the overtime and minimum wage regulations of the FLSA do not apply to this employee."

Clicking "next" brings a disclaimer and



Eric Iskra

a recommendation to contact Spilman for specific advice on particular cases, along with Spilman's phone number and email.

The app isn't intended only for clients. "We've made it available to anyone," Tower says. "We plan to look at the data as to whether it's just our client base or broader, but I assume it's going to be broader. Like most firms we view everybody as either a client or a prospective client."

"Many firms, some small, some large, have released apps, to serve up information in a way that's useful to clients," says Kent Zimmermann, a Chicago-based management consultant to law firms. "I've seen some from the big firms and some from the small firms. It still qualifies as innovative and forward thinking. I think it's smart. The legal profession is not widely perceived as a beacon of innovation. By releasing this app they have an opportunity to differentiate themselves from competitors in a way that distinguishes them in the minds of their clients and prospective clients." 