

Four ways to improve work-life balance



Kimberly Bull (left) and Amanda Dahl find that taking a mini-break away from their desks can lift their moods and give them energy.

Kimberly Bull used to feel guilty about leaving the office to pick up her two-year-old when there was still work to be done. But a recent workshop on work-life balance has given her a new perspective.

“My co-workers know my son is a priority. They also know that my work gets done. I’m learning to accept that work-life balance means something different to everyone,” said Kimberly, executive assistant to Caroline Gorsalitz, vice-president, corporate development.

Balancing work and life priorities was flagged as an issue for Kim’s department in the 2011 employee engagement survey. Caroline encouraged members of her team to explore the issue further, “because we all need to make sure we have a satisfying life and manage our energy levels. If you get off balance for too long you will lose your energy, your satisfaction and your overall effectiveness.”

When a seminar on the topic came to Caroline’s attention, she saw it as a timely opportunity. With the encouragement of Ken Seitz, senior vice-president and chief commercial officer, Kimberly, Amanda Dahl, Cammy Ouellette and Debbie Dellezay attended the seminar last spring and presented their learnings to the corporate development team.

The seminar was presented by consultant Patricia Katz, and these were the top four takeaways:

1. Decide what work-life balance means to you and stick to it. “When you’re starting your career, getting used to saying ‘no’ can be tough,” said Amanda, senior analyst, who has a 15-year-old son. “Family priorities and other responsibilities outside of work are a fact of life. I’m learning to be OK with that.”

2. Take a break. It’s easy to get caught up in the frenzy of our workday. It’s also unhealthy. Take time to pause and be in the moment.

Kimberly: “A lot of us got in the habit of eating our lunches at our desk. It’s better now. We try to make an effort to sit together and talk about things other than work.”

Amanda: “It does make a difference, even to get outside for half an hour and have a few laughs. I feel more energized, my mood is lifted and the afternoon goes by a lot quicker.”

3. Let go of the goal of getting “caught up.” Chipping away at that “to do” list is what keeps many employees working late when their home and family need attention. Amanda: “You will never be done. You have to get past that mindset.”

4. Celebrate your successes. Once you accept that your “to do” list is a work in progress, be good to yourself. Kimberly: “Instead of focusing on what didn’t get done, look at what you did accomplish and how well you did it.”



What do you tell your employees about work-life balance?

Caroline Gorsalitz: “It’s different for everyone and shifts as your circumstances change. Whether you’re pregnant, raising a toddler, caring for an aging parent, involved in the community, training for a marathon or totally engrossed in a challenging project at work, it’s going to look different. And that’s OK. You’ll never quite have the perfect balance, but if you make it a priority to focus on achieving the right balance for you and stick to it, you will have a rich and satisfying life.”