

# Law firms take steps to promote work-life balance

Workshops cover everything from eliminating clutter to caring for parents

GLEN KORSTROM

At first glance, it appears to be a typical Wednesday afternoon at a downtown law firm. About 20 people, mostly lawyers, nibble sandwiches and swap business cards in a McCarthy Tétrault LLP meeting room. But this isn't a typical board-room meeting: the topic today is how to unclutter your life, after first tackling the task of defining clutter.

The seminar is part of a Lifespeak Inc. series of work-life balance in-house workshops.

Lawyers are increasingly aware that their lives lack the balance achieved in the lives of most people.

Catalyst Canada Inc. released a survey of 1,400 lawyers across Canada on November 23. The

report found that lawyers are twice as likely as other Canadians to say they have difficulty juggling the demands of their work and personal life.

One-quarter of Canadians said they have trouble achieving an acceptable level of work-life balance, whereas half of the lawyers Catalyst surveyed said they have the same problem.

Local law firms, such as McCarthy Tétrault and Borden Ladner Gervais LLP, are turning to Toronto-based Lifespeak to try to address this problem.

Those firms have hired Lifespeak to present lunchtime seminars. Other components of Lifespeak's series focus on such topics as child discipline and caring for aged parents.

"There's a strong demand to integrate work-life balance work-

shops into the workplace," said Borden Ladner Gervais LLP managing partner, Tim McGee.

The age-old requirement to work long hours has made balancing work and personal life a common struggle for lawyers. The issue has become one of the Canadian Bar Association B.C. Branch's priorities at a time when that association grapples with voluntary membership and the challenge to stay relevant.

Demographic shifts such as a rise in the number of semi-retired lawyers and women lawyers have caused more lawyers to demand work-life balance, said CBABC executive director Frank Kraemer.

The McCarthy Tétrault group listened to Vancouver Island-based author and speaker Katherine Gibson, author of the book *Unclutter Your Life*.

Her simple solution to reducing clutter includes asking a few hard questions about every possession:

- Is this item useful in my life?
- Does it make me feel good?
- Do I need it?

Using that system helped her give away everything from tight-fitting clothes to a book on how to have a creative divorce.



DOMINIC SCHAEFER

Lisa Vogt: Lawyers are great at organizing their clutter, but the solution is to get rid of it

"Lawyers are very organized people, so eliminating clutter is not just a matter of being organized," said McCarthy Tétrault managing partner Lisa Vogt. Organizing your clutter won't help, she explained. "Clutter is something that you don't need."

To help lawyers get rid of work clutter, Vogt said, her firm

plans to implement a document management system that will encourage lawyers to rely on electronically scanned documents.

Few things add clutter more than printing e-mails complete with several reply strings, she said. ■

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