

Giving working parents a helping hand

BY KIRSTEN McMAHON
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A new program launched by mothering 'n more! and co-sponsored by Borden Ladner Gervais LLP will provide support, education, and networking opportunities to busy working parents seeking the all-important work-life balance.

Aimée Israel, CEO of mothering 'n more! Inc., which launched the Parents At Work program last month, is a mother and former corporate lawyer who knows all too well about the challenges of being a working parent. Israel founded the company along with president Michael Held, a father and also former lawyer, and vice-president Alexis Wise.

"After a number of years with working with other professionals we just really identified a need in that working parents feel alone and unprepared and need resources and tools, and sometimes the employers are looking to provide them but don't have the right tools," she says.

Israel says she would have lawyers come into the mothering 'n more! offices and lament that they felt they were the only

ones at their law firm who were struggling with being a working parent.

"Really just that feeling of being alone and facing all these challenges and not being able to do it," Israel says. "I guess one thing is to bring them the information but the other thing is to bring them together and help them realize they're not the only ones going through this and have them in a room with other people who are facing the same struggles and really kind of build that internal support network."

And they're definitely not alone. Recent stats from Statistics Canada show that last year, 72 per cent of all women with children under the age of 16 living at home were part of the employed workforce. A recent study from Health Canada also reports that "work-life conflict has increased markedly (particularly role overload), suggesting that a greater proportion of workers (men and women) are experiencing greater challenges in balancing their role of employee, parent, spouse, and eldercare giver."

Parents At Work is a corporate program that brings information and support to working parents

- family nutrition, preparing well-balanced, quick and easy meals;
- life and goal planning; and
- choosing your children's schools, having good relationships with schools, and the pitfalls of over scheduling children's activities.

"Finding a balance between a busy successful career and a family life is not easy," says Joanne Poljanowski, a senior partner at BLG. "The Parents At Work program is a valuable resource that we can employ to support our professionals in seeking such a balance. It's a win-win for the firm and working parents."

Thus far, BLG is the only law firm introducing Parents At Work, but professional services firm Ernst & Young will also be participating. Israel says interested firms can join forces with Parents At Work and do an internal survey and see which topics lawyers in the firm want to hear about.

Israel says there's a business case for firms to participate because they're enhancing their recruiting and retention by offering this type of program.

"It should result in increased productivity because you're saving someone a few hours on the Internet trying to find what's the

best way to do this or who's the expert on this," she says. "You're also helping them thrive as a parent which should make them more productive in terms of not having to run off and get all this information outside the workplace or be worrying about it because you know you're getting the resources that you need."

"The other benefit to the employer is just in its enhanced image as a socially responsible organization, because employers that do these types of initiatives are generally recognized for doing them. When a consumer is making their decision about whose product to choose, if all other things being equal and amongst the law firms there are a number that are top-tier, things like this help distinguish them as being a firm that cares as well as doing great work."

Poljanowski says not only is it a great program, it makes business sense. Through BLG's participation, she says they are building a firm that attracts the best legal talent and provides a supportive work environment.

"BLG is about understanding the pressures and demands," she says, and "helps them to be the best lawyers they can be and the best parents they can be."



Photo: Kirsten McMahon

Former lawyer Aimée Israel says working parents need resources and tools and companies can help provide that.

through monthly lunchtime sessions. Expert speakers will provide seminars to interested employees at their place of work on a variety of parenting and work-life balance topics.

Borden Ladner will be participating in the program, starting this month with a lunchtime session on child discipline.

Upcoming topics at BLG include:

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