

## Motorola PAWs toward a life skills plan

### Program helps frazzled workers with parenting

By: Rosie Lombardi

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Motorola Canada recently instituted a series of information workshops to assist employees struggling to balance their professional and family lives. The program is operated through Parents At Work (PAW), an independent outfit that partners with organizations and experts on the topic of balancing life issues with work ones. The program features practical seminars and sessions on a wide variety of parenting issues, from having a baby to finding a daycare centre to sending your kids off to university.

"We felt that the sessions would ultimately help our employees gain knowledge and build internal networks to deal with childcare issues while also increasing our productivity," says Frank Maw, president of Motorola Canada. "It would also help with our recruiting and reduce churn."

IT professionals have to deal with enormous work pressures, which often take their toll on families, particularly in the go-go world of wireless. "It's a fast-paced, competitive industry, and we're doing more today with fewer employees," says Maw. "The average cell phone has a market life of 16 to 18 months. We have to design our products, have them certified by carriers and (get them) out on the shelf to recover the cost and make our earnings before they're gone."

The kick-off PAW workshop selected by Motorola employees via survey was the wildly popular Power Struggles. It provides strategies for dealing with universal problems parents have with children of all ages, from getting howling toddlers into snowsuits to motivating sullen teenagers to take out the garbage every week.

An upcoming Common Childhood Medical Concerns session planned for the fall will provide employees the opportunity to speak with Dr. Jeremy Friedman, head of pediatrics at the Hospital for Sick Children. Motorola employees unable to attend the live session will be able to participate via teleconference and will have a remote call-in option to submit questions and receive personalized responses.

"As a parent, you don't get a lot of training. It's probably your toughest job, you're the least trained for it, and you're the harshest judge. If you're at work, you don't have information and you don't have support. That's what we've identified," says Aimée Israel, CEO of PAW.

The company has a list of over 60 recognized experts offering about a dozen workshops. PAW meets with organizations to gain an understanding of their micro-demographics to tailor a program of workshops. Some may be going through a small baby boom with most kids being under the age of five, while larger organizations with children in various age groups will need a different program. Based on feedback, the vast majority of employees say they leave PAW workshops with at least one good tip that saves them time and energy.

"So many industries recognize there is an issue — that employees want more time with their

families – but there was nothing they could put in place that would make a difference,” says Israel.

She adds that PAW’s involvement with their partner organizations’ personnel policies has limits. “We don’t go in and tell companies you should have flex-time or anything like that,” says Israel. “But you can really make a difference by helping people in other areas of their lives. Employers who think that family doesn’t creep into work really have their blinkers on if they don’t consider how much it costs to replace someone – 150 per cent of the salary to go out, recruit and retrain someone new.”

Motorola plans to use concrete metrics to evaluate the success of the PAW program. “We’ll track to see if there’s any difference in churn levels between people attending the sessions versus those who don’t,” says Maw. The company is also looking to see what feedback is generated from quarterly performance reviews.

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