

Time to find that balance

Good planning can help time-strapped lawyers achieve the work-life balance they crave, writes **Kate James**

LAWYERS ARE generally focused, hardworking and goal-oriented, but many practitioners, particularly the younger ones, are now interested in looking for something more than just a high-profile career with excellent financial rewards. While they want to achieve success in their careers, they also want to know that their life is meaningful in some way. This shift in focus has been gathering momentum in recent years. As the topics of work-life balance, social responsibility and personal development gain more air time, even the most driven personalities are getting drawn into the discussion about what makes a life well lived.

Most would agree that all that's really important is that each individual finds the

the importance of balance. "All the firms we work with know the value of the concept of work-life balance. There's no economic efficiency in burning out your staff. It's not something they are intentionally ignoring, but we're in a very busy market and the work just needs to be done." And there's no doubt that the staff who distinguish themselves by putting in the hours will be looked upon favourably when it comes to getting a share of quality work down the track.

CLEAR GOALS

Yet there are some lawyers willing to take up the challenge. Kai-Li Tan, senior associate at DLA Phillips Fox, came to see me 18 months ago to work on her career goals and work-life balance. Kai-Li was an intellectual property

Once she'd achieved her promotion, Kai-Li looked for ways to pursue her creative flair. As well as her involvement in rolling out the stylish and informative DLA Phillips Fox intellectual property newsletter, *Innovatus*, Kai-Li established her own clothing business earlier this year, which brings a commercial perspective to her legal work as well as satisfying her creativity.

PERSONAL COACHING INVALUABLE

Kai-Li is an exceptional role model for other lawyers of how much can be achieved with little time but good planning. She has a clear picture of where she's heading in both her personal and professional life and a plan about how she'll get there. She says personal coaching has been invaluable, helping her stay committed to the path she's chosen and giving her the chance to offload some of the day-to-day pressures. Unfortunately, Kai-Li's example is often far from the norm. There are many lawyers still cynical about the concept of work-life balance. Given they have little time to concentrate on anything other than maintaining or building their practice, it's understandable that many feel frustrated at the prospect of long hours being an ongoing issue.

Things are changing, but slowly. According to Sampson, the past three to four years has seen an increase in part-time positions being offered to long-standing, highly valued employees. Younger lawyers are demanding more balance, which senior lawyers are finding refreshing.

The challenge is for everyone in the firm to keep an open mind. Even the smallest amount of time can be used well. Having a personal vision for your future is important. Making time to develop your personal plans is essential. Challenging your mindset is imperative. Work-life balance is as much about your mental state as it is about how you spend your time. ●

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time and the energy to do the things that matter most to them. Whether that's working very long hours and achieving a high degree of professional success or something quite different, it's worth asking: what do you need to do to make your life balanced?

MAKING TIME

There are a whole range of areas that affect our sense of life balance: career, partner relationship; family; friends/social life; health; finances and outside interests, which might include creative pursuits or other personal interests; travel; or giving something back to the community. Given the long hours most lawyers work, it's difficult to make quality time for all of these areas, so the challenge is in the planning.

As Katherine Sampson, managing director of Mahlab Recruitment in Victoria, points out, even organisations with the best of intentions about life balance are finding it difficult to achieve. Sampson believes most understand

lawyer with a clear goal of wanting to achieve senior associate by the end of 2005 – something she has since achieved. She was willing to put in the hours and dedicate the time to increasing her profile in the office in order to achieve her goal. Yet those things came at a cost. She felt her fitness levels were suffering, as she found less time to get to the gym, and rushed meal preparation meant she and her partner weren't eating as well as they had been. As is often the case with personal coaching, Kai-Li and I spent some of our sessions reviewing the practicalities of planning a healthy lifestyle when she had little time to spare. We set about devising ways to incorporate exercise and meal-planning into her busy schedule. Kai-Li opted for riding her bike to work most mornings, something her partner joined her in. They found the change incredibly beneficial. Not only were they spending time together as a couple, they were improving their fitness and having fun at the same time.

Kate James is a work-life balance coach, speaker and writer. She works with professional people who want to enhance their quality of life by making the right career and life choices. www.totalbalance.com.au



Life satisfaction quiz

Scoring: Rate yourself as to how you typically respond in each of the situations listed. Choose at least one area that you'll make a change in... and make a start within the next 24 hours. Take a copy of the quiz, date it and make a note in your diary to review it again in a month. 5 = always, 4 = mostly, 3 = often, 2 = sometimes, 1 = never

I know my strengths and natural talents and how I can use them.	YOUR SCORE	I feel a sense of control with regard to my finances and financial plans.	YOUR SCORE	I am happy with my relationships with my parents and siblings.	YOUR SCORE
I have a 'bigger picture' purpose in life and know how I will achieve this.		I love my work and feel that what I do is aligned with my values.		I have a life partner who delights me and our relationship gets better every year.	
I am living a life I'm proud of and I have something to look forward to every day.		I feel free to communicate clearly in all of my relationships and know I will be heard and understood.		I am happy with my physical appearance.	
I have a clear picture of three important things I would like to achieve in the next 12 months and I know how I will reach these goals.		Others find me inspirational and positive because of the way I live my life.		I eat a healthy diet, manage alcohol and coffee intake and exercise at least three times per week.	
I know how to keep myself motivated with regard to achieving my goals.		I know how to say no.		I make time to do something indulgent or relaxing for myself every week.	
I understand what success means to me.		I have great relationships with the people I work with.		I take annual holidays and really unwind.	
		I have a supportive network of friends who encourage me to live my ideal life.		I feel calm and in control most of the time.	

SCORE /100