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SOUTH JERSEY BUSINESS WORK & SAVE

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Balancing work and family is no longer all on you, Mom

Friday, September 30, 2005

By KATIE GRASSO
 Courier-Post Staff

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"It's not every day that everything in my life is going to be balanced."

That is what Shawn Kershaw, who owns a Delaware Valley consulting company, tells herself in order to keep her job, family and well-being in check.

Today, balancing work and family is not just a women's issue, but everyone's issue. And now, companies are beginning to give women and men equal rights when it comes to taking personal time away from work.

At Grant Thornton, an accounting and business advising firm in Philadelphia, employees are given personal time with no questions asked.

Senior manager Terri Albertson said they discuss balancing home and work as early as the job interview.

"It's important to know what is important in life so you can associate yourself with things and people who help you achieve those goals," Albertson said.

But not all businesses have policies that allow their employees to take personal time to deal with individual or family issues. Many of these policies come from employees seeking changes within their office, according to Lynn Ingenhuett-Quinn, director of Work/Life Balance, a nonprofit organization serving the tri-state area that advises businesses.

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"If you want to work in a different way, propose a plan to your employer," said Ingenhuett-Quinn. "If you've been a good worker, be proactive and go in thinking, 'how can we work this out?' instead of 'if this doesn't work, I'm going to quit.' "

But at a recent Professional Women's Roundtable seminar on the topic in Philadelphia, Kershaw warns that the employer does not have an obligation to its employees' needs.

"Employers don't have an obligation to keep their employees happy, they have an obligation to be fair," she said. "It's up to the employees to make themselves happy."

If combining work and home life doesn't always have a perfect fit, there are things you can do to manage time more efficiently. Kershaw suggests documenting a workweek to see how much time you devote to work, family and recreation. Then create a schedule that works best for you, your employer and your family.

"Be pragmatic. Schedule time for family but also schedule time for work so it gets done," she said. "Most importantly, realize there are times when your life is going to be out of balance and accept that."

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