

## SALUTE TO WOMEN IN NEW ENGLAND INSURANCE PAGE 8

## The Balancing Act: Strategies for Achieving Work-Life Harmony

MANCHESTER, N.H. — Since the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in new ways of working — both remotely and in hybrid situations — it has become more difficult for some insurance professionals to set boundaries at work and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Long hours can encroach on personal time and lead to burnout, poor health and diminished job satisfaction. A panel of leaders recently took part in a discussion at the Big “I” New Hamp-

shire’s leadership summit on how to find greater satisfaction in achieving the right balance in managing professional responsibilities and personal commitments.

What does it mean to find work-life balance? The answer to that question can be deeply personal and differs for everyone. “It is an art, not a science,” according to Lisa Kilbreth, CPCU, regional vice president, Acadia Insurance.

“To me, work-life balance is being able to bring your best self to both work and your personal life — and by that, I mean being engaged. When you are at work, are you present and not just showing up with your mind somewhere else? It’s the exact same thing for your personal life.”

For Leah Walsh, senior underwriting director, Liberty Mutual Insurance, striking the right work-life balance allows her to achieve her responsibilities. “It enables me to work towards and achieve my goals. Then, just as important, I’m able to support others and lift them up along the way.” She added that it is about defining balance for yourself. “It’s not what is work-life balance for your peers, your partner, your manager, your leader or even your direct reports. It’s what’s important to you.”

### Working From Home

Many professionals who work from home for all or part of the work week find the boundaries between work and home life are blurred with no clear end to the workday.

“Remote work needs boundaries like everything else. If you don’t set them, you are going to be in a continuous loop that doesn’t stop,” said Kilbreth. For her,



*(Left to right) Lisa Kilbreth of Acadia Insurance, Leah Walsh of Liberty Mutual Insurance, Alison Milioto of BlueLion LLC, and Joan Pageau of the Big “I” New Hampshire, discussed the challenges and rewards of finding work-life balance.*

staying organized and taking time to unwind are key components of striking the right work-life balance.

Having clarity of purpose, planning and prioritization are the three tenets Walsh adheres to. “Work-life balance for me is understanding my purpose, but the effects of planning and prioritization is what makes it all happen.” Sometimes it is as simple as taking a break at lunch time to prep food for that night’s dinner, so she can spend more time with her family after work. “Fine tuning our balance is something that’s a continual work in progress. We have to refine it. If I was going to tell my younger self something, it would be to make time for reflection because that gives you the ability to fine tune, to adjust and to make sure that what you’re doing is working for you,” said Walsh.

Alison Milioto, founder of human resources consulting company BlueLion, works remotely fulltime — as do her employees. She acknowledged that she has historically had a difficult time setting work-life boundaries; however this year, she has made a concerted effort to take breaks and log off at the end of the day. “As soon as my significant other would leave for work at 7:00 a.m., I’d log on and start working. I wouldn’t stop until he pulled into the driveway at the end of the day. Now, I don’t start working until 8:00 a.m. I sit on my couch with a cup of coffee, an English muffin and watch Law and Order and enjoy that hour of my time,” said Milioto.

## Friction Between Remote and Onsite Employees

Tension can arise between remote employees and onsite team members due to perceived inequities, which can create resentment and feelings of unfairness. One summit attendee said that while her work-from-home coworkers were running errands and picking up their children, she was answering their phone calls in addition to her own. When she asked for advice on how to handle the

situation, panelists encouraged her to make sure she fully understands the situation and to not assume that she is working harder.

“That person may be trying really hard to juggle their own personal life and work. They may have to pick up their kids because they have no other help. Maybe they log on at five in the morning and work through lunch when you’re in the break room having cake with everyone in the office and log back in at 10:00 p.m.,” said Kilbreth.

She added that every agency and carrier has a business plan with goals and objectives for everyone. Good managers know who is meeting their goals and who isn’t. “If you feel as though somebody’s not pulling their weight, there’s nothing wrong with having a discussion with your manager, but do it very gently and empathetically. Be very aware that you may not have all the facts,” she said.

Milioto’s answer was to the point: Mind your business. “You don’t know what’s going on. I am a strong believer that if you really want to succeed in what you’re doing, the more you focus on yourself, the faster you will climb.”

## Taking Vacation Time

A lack of vacation time can cause stress and lead to burnout for employees, which reduces productivity and job satisfaction and creates negativity in the workplace. Taking time away from work is critical to personal well-being and health. Additionally, it can offer rewards that boost productivity, lead to higher-quality work and inject energy into the workplace upon the employee’s return.

Whether vacations are completely scheduled from beginning to end or relatively unstructured, employees often feel more satisfied with their jobs if they take regular vacations. Happier employees tend to stay at their jobs longer and be more productive as well.

“Vacations on a beach or at a lake are

my favorite places to go. Walking along the beach gives me time for reflection and to make sure that the hamster wheel that we’re all on every day is moving in the right direction,” said Walsh.

“Life is not about work. Work allows you to have a life,” emphasized Milioto. “You have to take time to remember the reason you’re working is to enjoy life.”

Staycations can be as enjoyable as jetting off to an exotic location. “You have to be able to unplug and get away from work. Maybe you’re a gardener, and you want to take two full days off to plant seedlings, and then three weeks later take another few days off to do something else. It doesn’t have to be a full week away, but it does have to be time away,” said Milioto. She reminded attendees that companies don’t give awards to employees who don’t use their paid time off.

To get the most out of vacation time, panelists recommended preparing the workplace for their absence. Take care to get as much done as you can ahead of time, update managers on your projects and organize your workspace to be ready for your return.

Walsh noted that communicating with managers about potential issues that could happen while you’re away and updating them on what is currently on your desk as helpful in setting expectations. “Don’t be shy to say what you’re working on, and don’t assume that they know what you’re doing because that’s not always the case,” she said.

Managers, agency owners and carrier executives should be leading by example as well, creating a culture where employees do not feel as if they cannot ask for time off.

“We’re all adults. We’re here to have a common objective and hit company goals. When you’re treating coworkers with a [certain] level of respect and autonomy, the results speak for themselves over time,” said Milioto. ■

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