

fringe benefits

Get More Done ...and Still Have a Life

The United States

Department of Labor would like you to know something: You have been busy. You may not have enough time to read the report on how busy you are, so here are the key points. Third Quarter 2003 non-farm, non-manufacturing productivity rose 8.6 percent and output increased 10 percent. Working hours rose 1.4 percent while pay increased 2.3 percent. This higher productivity with a limited increase in costs is a grand recipe for increased earnings. But human resources managers have now learned there is an equal and opposite reaction to this increased productivity: a \$300 billion price tag for stress induced absenteeism, burnout, retraining, replacement and stress-related illnesses (per the American Institute of Stress). Productivity in its rawest form appears to derail a company's long range goals for the retention of high-performance employees.

Atlanta is at the forefront of a strategy that uses an employee benefit to remedy the situation. Major firms such as Alston and Bird, Kilpatrick Stockton, Motorola and Solvay Pharmaceuticals looked at the simple math and figured that it is counter productive for an employee to use his or her time, talent and energy on a task that can be done for them at a cost much lower than their hourly production. This human arbitrage is made possible by 2Places At 1Time, a personal services company led by Georgia Tech alum Andrea Arena. She pioneered the concept of the corporate subsidy of people and time as an employee benefit productivity tool. The concept is enjoying nationwide success.

Here is how it works: Your HR department hires a personal services firm that brings in company-specific people dedicated to clearing up all the things that can stop you and your employees from tackling the revenue-generating issues of the day. For a designated co-pay, you and your team have someone on call who will service your car, organize your office, print and ship mass mailings, clean your home, stock your refrigerator, winterize your boat,

register your kids for school, remember your Mom's birthday (with a thoughtful gift, exquisitely wrapped) and get you tickets for Maddox's first trip back to Turner Field in a new uniform.

This is not the same as a corporate concierge (you know, the nice kid sitting in the lobby selling tickets to Urinetown on Ice). Think of this as a strategic, professional, nationwide personal support staff to handle all the things that keep you from your work, your bartender and your court-required time with the family. Also don't think of the service as a normal benefit, such as medical or dental. Those are benefits you are glad you have and hope you never have to use. Professional assistance is a benefit you should use often to off-load menial tasks so you can be more productive writing contracts or making a sale.

Kecia, who is assigned full time to Kilpatrick Stockton, explains that it takes a few months for people to get the hang of using the service. At first, service requests are simple. "Can you do my grocery shopping?" "Get the emission test and register my car?"

Over time the requests become, "Can you get my pets boarded so I can leave on an unexpected trip?" "Can you go to my house, get my blue suit and meet me at the airport?"

Eventually they progress to "Can you research what I need to do to adopt a baby?" "Gather all of the choices I have in Jaguars and help me execute the sale while I am out of the country?" "Find the perfect music, restaurant and jeweler so I can propose with more class and creativity than I really possess?" These were all executed more than once.

The unseen benefit from all of this service — which clients say comes with flair, style and lagniappe — is the sense of relief. When their home life is spent on more than preparing to return to work, they come back rested and restored. And when an employee is only focused on work, they produce better work.

Now if you could only find the time to research and hire these people. —John A. Morabito