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## **Balanomics**

### **Local attorneys help design national model for work/life balance**

By **DOUG SHERWIN**, The Daily Transcript

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Four female attorneys, including three from San Diego, have teamed up to develop an effective way for law firms to keep retention high and profits soaring through a balanced work/life environment.

Their initiative, called Balanomics, improves on most work/life balance programs by focusing on the financial benefits such efforts provide to both firms and their clients.

"What makes this Balanomics program different from other programs is it's focused on the economic value that work/life balance has on a legal organization's productivity and profitability," said Jerrilyn Malana, president of the San Diego County Bar Association. "This Balanomics initiative demonstrates that work/life balance programs are a win-win proposition for employees and employers."

Balanomics is the brainchild of Deborah Henry, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers; Darragh Davis, general counsel of **Petco**; Rupa Singh, a San Diego partner at **McKenna Long & Aldridge**; and Elizabeth Daniels, chief legal counsel for SIMNSA Health Plan. Davis, Singh and Daniels are all San Diego-based attorneys.

The basic premise of the initiative is that a poor work/life culture in an office can lead to the loss of talented employees, which then can cause a decrease in productivity and profitability.

Balanomics also shows how a reduction in work force -- whether by attrition in good times or layoffs in bad -- disrupts continuity in legal representation and forces a client to incur the costs of getting the new attorneys up to speed on a case.

"Each hour that the in-house attorney spends on such efforts is an hour that the client then needs to purchase elsewhere," Petco's Davis said, "and not necessarily at the firm (that) is creating the need to outsource that hour. Those firms that are committed to work/life initiatives will have less turnover and will be perceived by their clients as delivering more economic service as a whole than competitors who are less committed."

According to the Balanomics initiative, allowing attorneys to work flexible and reduced hours and offering them the option of working from home can create a strong work/life balance.

Decreasing attorney workloads not only can increase their efficiency and productivity, according to Henry, but it can help mitigate the need for layoffs.

"Now more than ever, law firms are becoming more cost conscious, especially with regard to personnel costs," said Nadia Bermudez, president of the Lawyers Club of San Diego. "The point of Balanomics is in the long term, having modified schedules and really working to retain talented individuals. It has a long-term economic benefit to firms."

Another unique component of Balanomics is how it connects work/life balance issues to the discussion on diversity.

"You have to address work-life issues or else you're not going to increase that (diverse) representation," Henry said.

Henry and her fellow founding partners are hoping to get law firms, general counsels and professional associations to sign a statement in support of the Balanomics initiative. In reaching this goal, they are partnering with professional organizations throughout the country to host a program featuring the initiative.

"It's about getting people's attention about what we're doing," Henry said. "We're really interested in initiating a national dialogue about the benefits of work/life balance and how it's integral to the diversity issue."

The Lawyers Club of San Diego, in partnership with the San Diego County Bar, hosted the inaugural event March 19. Approximately 150 people attended, showing there was significant interest.

"What was eye opening for me as a participant in the program is the work done by the program in shattering myths associated with work/life balance programs," said Malana, a partner at **Little Mendelson**. "They have started the dialogue, and I'm interested in learning more."

There's a blog set up on the Balanomics Web site to engage people in this process, and it lets people share their thoughts about each event.

"Balanomics will, over time, focus increasingly on the economic evidence that work/life balance initiatives lead to retention, and retention leads to greater firm profitability," Davis said. "It is also a very inclusive initiative which invites the participation of not only law firms and in-house departments, but professional associations as well, to promote the sharing of information in as wide a network as possible."

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