

Reinvent your job and reclaim your life in 2007

By Hayley Dunne

Like most people you probably forgot what your 2006 New Year resolutions were before January was out and then conveniently decided to park the whole idea of life changing measures for another 12 months.

After all, January is the best time to make a new start and promise both ourselves and each other that things are going to change for the better.

Now that challenging milestone is returning with unseemly haste. No doubt, as you scan across your list of priorities for action - such as the diet that won't fail, or the gym that will be visited more than once in a blue moon - your searchlight of discontent is bound to focus at some stage upon your current job.

When we're not feeling as positive as we might about life, our job is very often identified as the root of the problem, the yoke of daily 'oppression' that stresses us out and keeps us from doing the things we love.

No wonder then that New Year usually sees around three quarters of the working population claiming to be considering a new career as the route to injecting fresh impetus and finding that elusive work-life balance.

This may set pulses racing down at the recruitment agency, it's hardly great news for employers who face the theoretical possibility of losing almost 75% of their staff in the space of a few weeks.

But neither is this such an attractive prospect for workers who could find themselves competing with millions of others pursuing that same elusive New Year job-switch that will change their whole life experience.

So, if you are one of the many employees seriously thinking about quitting for a new post that will deliver the work-life balance you crave, then think again. It may not be the job itself that's at fault. It may be just the way you approach it.

In reality the grass is not always greener on the other side of the job fence. At Chwarae Teg, when dealing with our clients, we often find that job dissatisfaction is closely linked with feelings of being overwhelmed by daily demands and inflexible hours that can send stress levels soaring.

Nearly 80% of employees surveyed by job placement agency, Work UK, see the quest for work-life balance as a very important consideration, if not the key factor, in deciding to leave for a new job.

However it's important to understand that you could actually give yourself and your current job a new lease of life by organising your working day in a different way leading to a happier and more rewarding career that is balanced with an equally fulfilled personal life.

If that's what you're seeking in 2007 then consider the following:

- **Investigate:** It could be that your organisation or company has already made a paper commitment concerning work life balance with initiatives such as flexible working, job sharing, home working, term-time contracts, career breaks, childcare provision, time off for emergency care responsibilities to name but a few. If so, take some time to read these policies and then seek advice on how you can make the most of these opportunities.
- **Negotiate:** by making contact with your personnel, HR or line manager and presenting a business case outlining how you would like to work differently and the potential benefits to the business, in addition to how it would benefit you personally. For example demonstrate how you would organise your hours and working location so you would still meet the demands of your job. Is it really essential you are in the office from nine to five? It is in an employer's interest to consider alternative working arrangements. After all, if a solution can be found, you will be happier and more likely to stick around for longer, cutting down on recruitment and training costs.
- **It's an issue for everyone:** The right to a work-life balance is not something just for women with children or those with caring responsibilities. Everyone, regardless of age or gender responsibilities or activities outside work which they are entitled and wish to attend to.
- **Take a step back:** Make some time over the Christmas break to reflect on your life outside work and think about how you could make the most of the hours you do have to yourself. Think about the things you enjoy doing and make time to do them. This could be enrolling in a dance class, joining a book club, learning a new skill - something that is completely different to what you do during the day. This will help you feel as if you have properly left the office. The positive impact of this on your job performance can be dramatic.
- **And lastly, look to the future:** Imagine what life will be like if you stick to your New Year's Resolution. We all have our off days in the office, but it may not be the job you dislike but more the way you work. By looking at the hours you work, where you work and how you work could be the key to being able to say next December that 2007 was the year your Resolution became a reality.

Many of us are in jobs that we worked hard to secure, through study, training and commitment. As such we should not be tempted to throw it all away in search of something potentially less fulfilling because of the pressures of juggling competing demands between home and work life.

You might be due a move to another job anyway but don't assume this is the case. Before you go rushing into the unknown try re-inventing the job you've already got.

Hayley Dunne, is Work-Life Balance Expert at Chwarae Teg, the body which promotes sustainable workforces and women's economic development and is the lead partner in the Welsh Assembly Government's pan-Wales Work Life Balance initiative. More information from chwaraeteg.com.