

Cleveland law firm offers perks that help employees balance work and family

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Tracy Boulian/The

Plain Dealer Chris Williams, a partner at Calfee Halter & Griswold, serves up plates of chicken piccata, macaroni and cheese, and tomato and mozzarella salad while his son, Jack, 6, puts a dish of chicken and rigatoni on the kitchen counter. Daughter Mia, 2, peeks out from behind her father's back. Williams helped brainstorm ideas for the new program at Calfee that aims to take the hassle out of work-life challenges such as what to do for dinner.

Imagine being able to order your family's dinner from your work computer in the morning and get it delivered to your office just before you leave for the day.

Or bringing your grocery list, your dry cleaning or that pair of shoes with the worn heels to the office so someone else can run those pesky errands for you.

Those are some of the perks the Calfee, Halter & Griswold LLC law firm now offers its 330 employees -- both lawyers and support staff -- in Cleveland and Columbus. A new program aims to take some of the hassle out of trying to juggle work, family and free time.

Calfee Lifestyle Resources

Calfee Halter & Griswold's new Lifestyle Resources program gives the law firm's employees easy access to a variety of perks. Workers pay for goods and services and the firm covers delivery charges. The perks include:

- Groceries and made-to-go dinners from Constantino's Market.
- A list of restaurants that deliver or offer carryout via Food Fetchers 2 U and Deliver Me Food.
- Dry cleaning and on-site alterations through Avon Laundry and Dry Cleaning.
- Shoe repair and shoe shining by Brass Tack Shoe Repair.

- Private lactation rooms for nursing mothers.
- Referrals for regular and emergency child care options from Starting Point.
- Contact information for local gyms, nutrition Web sites and healthy living Web sites.
- On-site yoga, pilates and Weight Watchers clinics. The firm is also testing interest in kickboxing, core conditioning and Zumba aerobic dance classes.
- Escorts to your car.
- An organizational consultant to help you organize your home or office.
- Postal services that let you buy stamps at or mail packages from the office.
- After-hours, in-home tech support for computers and laptops. Calfee Lifestyle Resources offers an extensive menu of services, from child care referrals and postal services to Weight Watchers and an "organizational consultant," all accessible via the company's intranet.

"It's magic, it's pure magic," said Marcia Wexberg, the partner on Calfee's executive committee who developed the program. "It just happens, and it enables the lawyers to do everything they need to do."

Few people know that better than Chris Williams, a partner trying to raise three young children with a wife who also works full time. For Williams, the hardest, most stressful part of his day begins after he leaves the office.

Besides picking up his daughters, Anna, 4, and Mia, 2, from day care and his son, Jack, 6, from first grade, coaxing them into their car seats and refereeing their back-seat squabbles, he is also worries whether "the kids will be calm enough once we're home so I can tend to the phone calls and e-mails" that need after-hours attention.

More often than not, he would end up deciding what to serve for dinner while pulling into the drive-through at McDonald's, Wendy's or Burger King. That never sat well with his wife, Cynthia Mog, a senior associate at another Cleveland law firm, Squire, Sanders & Dempsey LLP.

"Once you get little kids strapped into their car seats, you don't want to stop," Williams said. "They're tired and hungry, and especially in bad weather in Cleveland, you don't want to do anything except make a break for home."

But now, Williams orders his family's dinner from Constantino's Market downtown and has it delivered to his office before he leaves. After he gets everyone home and pops the food into the oven to warm, he finds time to squeeze in a quick workout on the elliptical trainer.

"They don't like the food as much as they like McDonald's or Wendy's, but I recognize that this is better for them," he said.

Calfee Lifestyle Resources is a way for the firm to give "the gift of time" to those who might put in 60 to 90 hours a week, said Brent Ballard, managing partner of Cleveland's third-largest law firm.

"If things aren't getting done at home, I'm distracted at work," Ballard said. "If I'm happy, I'm going to be more productive."



John Kuntz/The Plain Dealer Frank Stein, a tailor from Avon Laundry and Dry Cleaning, pins the hem of Cristin Snodgrass' bridesmaid's dress at the Calfee Halter & Griswold law firm. "When you have free time, this isn't what you want to spend your time doing," said Snodgrass, a senior attorney.

Although the concierge services Calfee provides are among the most comprehensive in Cleveland, they are fairly typical among New York law firms, said Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC in Philadelphia, a national consulting firm on work-life balance and women's issues in the legal profession.

Workplace perks do indeed help busy professionals, she said, but they also boost productivity for the firm.

"By having a tailor or a gym in the building, it enables people to just work more and more -- and that's the risk," Henry said.

Barbara Danforth, president and chief executive of the YWCA of Greater Cleveland and a lawyer herself, applauds programs such as Calfee's for addressing the real challenges of working parents, but wonders about the trade-off of eliminating the reasons lawyers might need to leave the office.

She says lawyers often ask her to keep her early childhood programs open until 9 p.m. to accommodate their late hours, but she has always refused because she doesn't want children spending 10 hours in day care. If lawyers spend less time running errands, they should spend more time with their families, going on vacations and relaxing, she said.

Calfee's services are coordinated by Bonnie Hardin-Mitchell, while Michelle Carter and Jill Jones oversees the deliveries and other details.

Cristin Snodgrass, a senior attorney at Calfee, has tried nearly all the services, including having her bridesmaid's dress hemmed by Frank Stein, a tailor from Avon Laundry and Dry Cleaning downtown.

"Otherwise, I'd have to drive all the way out to North Olmsted and then go back to pick it up and try it on again," she said. "I'd have to leave [work] early to get there, because no place is open late enough."

She figures the 10 to 15 minutes she spent getting fitted by Stein might have taken two to three hours had she done it outside the office.

And when Calfee workers can bank free time like that, Wexberg sees the value of the program she helped build.

"If there's more time for family, then there's more time for everything," she said. "Then everybody's happier."