

BC3 Lunch & Learn presenter to discuss goals, unplugging, sleep as key to work-life balance

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Public health consultant Tabitha Reefer, of Kittanning, is shown Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2019, on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township, Butler County. Reefer will discuss "Achieving Work-Life Balance" on Nov. 12 during the first of a 2019-2020 Lunch & Learn Series of presentations planned by BC3's Workforce Development division. Reefer's presentation will be held at the Butler YMCA.

(Butler, PA) U.S. adults work an average of 47 hours a week at their full-time job, with some addressing the approximately 77 legitimate business emails they receive daily for up to five hours on weekends, according to private reports and surveys dating to 2013, and leave up to seven vacation days unused each year.

"Even if you're on vacation, you're still working," Tabitha Reefer said.

And, she added, "We're not getting enough sleep."

The Kittanning consultant for organizations such as the state Department of Health will discuss "Achieving Work-Life Balance" during a Nov. 12 presentation that is the first of a 2019-2020 Lunch &

Learn Series of presentations planned by Butler County Community College's Workforce Development division.

BC3's two-hour Lunch & Learn at the Butler YMCA, 339 N. Washington St., begins at 11:30 a.m. with a chance to network, followed by a light lunch catered by Cannella Cafe, Butler, and Reefer's 90-minute presentation, said Kathy Strobel, BC3's coordinator of business training.

Registration is required, and seating is limited for the program, which costs \$10 per person.

Goal-setting, unplugging and sleep will be among the topics the 29-year-old realized as important following her 2015 graduation from the University of Pittsburgh with a master of public health degree.

Checking emails at bedtime

Work-life balance was "always kind of in my mind throughout school," said Reefer, who worked full time while a full-time student pursuing bachelor's degrees in anthropology and statistics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a master of business administration degree from Ashford University in Iowa, and her degree from Pittsburgh.

"But when you're in school, you just buckle down and it is what it is," Reefer said. "You've got to work to eat, start paying off your loan, go to class. But I still had that mentality once I was finished with school."

That's when she started her consultant business after spending at least eight hours at a full-time job at the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, where she serves as child nutrition outreach coordinator for Armstrong, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties.

"And I realized I was checking my emails until I was falling asleep," Reefer said, echoing Americans' reluctance to disconnect and cited in "Email Statistics Report: 2015-2019" by the Radicati Group, Palo Alto, Calif.; and in a 2015 survey by the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, N.C.

As is the case with the 40 percent of Americans who responded to a 2013 Gallup survey as having fewer than seven hours of sleep within 24 hours, "I wasn't sleeping my best, which, of course, affects your mental health," Reefer said. "I felt stressed all the time" and would deflect that stress upon family members, she said.

Work-life balance "is something that a lot of professionals struggle with," Strobel said, adding that those who successfully achieve balance could possibly become more productive.

Employees' productivity declines after a 50-hour workweek and plummets after 55 hours, according to a 2014 study published by John Pencavel, of Stanford University.

Missing chances "to recharge"

Work-life balance can increase productivity, Reefer said, "because people will have better moods. You're not thinking of that 7 o'clock (meeting), you're not writing that email to a co-worker. Some people say, 'Well, I check it but I don't email back.' You still think about that email. Or, 'I got a text. I have to email

so-and-so in the morning' instead of just seeing that email at 8 or 9 the next morning when you get to work.”

U.S. adults work an average of 47 hours a week at their full-time job, according to a 2014 Gallup Survey, and leave up to seven vacation days unused each year, according to a 2019 Priceline Work-Life Balance Report.

Yet while taking vacation, “many Americans are checking their emails, taking calls,” and missing opportunities “to recharge” and prevent burnout, Reefer said.

BC3’s Lunch & Learn Series represents the implementation of an objective in the college’s 2017-2022 strategic plan in that it is intended to build relationships to advance economic development and quality of life in the community, according to BC3 Workforce Development administrators.

The workshops in downtown Butler also represent the first open programming in the city by BC3’s Workforce Development division.

Sessions within the past year included “Outside the Box-Creative Thinking,” “Grief in the Workplace,” “Goal Setting,” “Hands-Only CPR-Save A Life” and “Active Listening.”

BC3’s next Lunch & Learn Series presentation may be held in February, Strobel said.

Those interested in registering for the Nov. 12 Lunch & Learn can visit bc3.edu/lunch-learn or call 724-287-8711 Ext. 8476 for corporate billing.