

# Work to live...

Balancing work and life responsibilities is a challenge for many institute members. In February, acclaimed coach Samantha Collins led an evening seminar to share ideas and tools for achieving that balance



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Organised by the institute as part of its Narrowing the Gap career management initiative (see February, p112), the topic of balancing work and life responsibilities clearly hit a nerve. Around 80 participants signed up to attend. Collins feels this is an important issue for accountants. 'There can be a lot of pressure to work long hours,' she says.

Collins has developed a three-stage model to help people achieve better balance in their lives. 'The first stage is about vision and direction – what does balance look like? What do I want it to be?' Collins says she encourages people to be 'a little idealistic' initially. 'In any profession people are incredibly analytical, logical and realistic and think things through. But sometimes it's important to tap into their creative side first and create a vision for themselves.'

The second stage of the model is about what Collins calls 'powerful choice'. She explains that people

often create their own barriers to achieving the working life they want – 'sometimes we are trapped by our own mindset' – and assume, for example, that a boss will rule out any change to working hours or style. Making powerful choices includes deciding to say no to a late night assignment 'and being OK with the consequences', while understanding that another time a midnight stint may be required.

Energy management forms the third element of Collins' model. 'This is about looking at what gives us energy and what takes energy away. This is about helping us play to our strengths and not get sucked into negative situations.'

Collins encourages participants to commit to specific actions after the seminar, drawing on the many ideas for improving work/life balance pooled from previous seminars. Attendees are also encouraged to become

'buddies' with those sitting next to them. They can then follow up with each other after the seminar, to see if they have done what they said they would, and if not, why not. 'It could be a phone call, an email, a coffee,' Collins says. 'They could become mentors to each other.'

There is no doubting Collins' passion for her work. In 2000, she founded Aspire, a thriving executive coaching firm for women. Since then, she has received an award from the Queen as one of the top 200 women to impact business and industry. She has worked hard to achieve her success, however, and that includes building a happy personal life. Collins married for the second time last year, now lives in Los Angeles near the sea (her visionary location) and is expecting her first child. 'In my life now I am as balanced as I have ever been, but I have had to work at it,' she says. 'I have followed exactly the model I teach.'

## Ideas for improved balance

- Focus on outcomes – 'what do I want to happen?' instead of 'what do I have to do?'
- Don't do everything – 20% of your actions get 80% of your results
- Schedule preparation and planning time into your diary to avoid 'overwhelm'
- Take time before you say yes or no to a new project, and have clear decision criteria
- Schedule pockets of 'open time' in your diary – spare time to allow for the unexpected
- Take time out to weed your commitments on a regular basis. If you take on a commitment which you don't do properly, the time spent on it is wasted
- Create a 'not to do' list and tick things off when you don't do them
- Deal with emails at only two set points in the day – mid-morning and mid-afternoon