



Wellness Workshops Offered by Your Employee Assistance Program

by KATHY TAYLOR-ROGERS

Have you ever felt that as a staff group you never get an opportunity to talk about anything other than work, your students and what is happening with one or the other or both? Do you feel like you are caught up in the fierce winds of a tornado with work demands, family demands, community demands draining the life right out of you? Do you ever wish that you had the opportunity as a group to stop and take some time to step out of the tornado that your lives have become and figure out what you need to do to slow things down and find a better way to reorganize and better balance your lives? If your answer to any of these questions is 'YES', then it sounds as though a Wellness Workshop might be helpful for you and your staff group.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has two initiatives. One is the individual support component, the details of which were well articulated in Marie Wall's article in the September/October 2003 issue of *The Bulletin*. This aspect of the program is designed to provide support and resources to address problems, issues and concerns of individual teachers after they have been identified. This is a very essential part of any Employee Assistance Program, as it provides the support and assistance necessary to assist our teachers in working through the personal and professional challenges that can often present obstacles within their lives.

It is the other essential component of our program to which I would like to draw attention – the Wellness Promotion aspect of our Employee Assistance Program. It is through this aspect of the program that we attempt to take a preventive approach to Wellness. Wellness and healthy living, although seemingly a logical direction for life to take, are not as easy to attain as one would think. For many reasons we seem to gravitate toward unhealthy habits within our lives. I question whether much of this can be attributed to the hectic pace at which we live. Some factors that contribute to this hectic pace may be: both parents working outside of the home; increased workload demands; single parent families; varied involvement of children in extra-curricular activities; demands of volunteer activities; responsibilities related to aging parents; and the list goes on. Many of these demands push and pull at us

and take up much of our waking hours. This leaves us with little time to sit and reflect on what is happening within our lives; to identify where we are not taking care of ourselves and to make the changes needed to improve our health and overall well being.

Wellness workshops delivered by the EAP's Employee Assistance Coordinators are designed to encourage staff groups to take the time to reflect on their lives and on where they are with regard to healthy and balanced living. They provide an opportunity to conduct a self-inventory to determine which aspects of our lives we are satisfied with and which areas we need to work on to develop a better balance. Finding balance and living a healthier lifestyle takes time, energy and motivation. The first step is to identify that there are problems with the current lifestyle and then determine what changes need to be made and how you can best make them. The next step is to implement your identified plan for change and stick to it. The benefit of tackling this in a supportive atmosphere with your colleagues around you is that through group discussion we often recognize that we are not alone in the struggle to find balance. Discussion can also lend valuable insight into some of the dangers and traps we can fall into if we do not decide to move in a more positive direction. Once decisions to make changes are made teachers can develop support networks to encourage each other in their efforts to stick with their plans for positive change.

The range of topics for workshops is very open with some of the more commonly requested topic areas being: Coping with Stress; Living a More Balanced Life; Team Building; Making Transitions; and Taking Care of Ourselves. When evaluations are received back from workshop presentations, we usually hear from teachers that they would find it beneficial to do a workshop in a related area at least once a year. Workshops not only provide teachers with an opportunity to do some needed self-reflection, they also provide an opportunity for staff groups to share with each other and spend time talking about themselves and their lives on a different level. It can be an effective bonding experience and help colleagues to see each other from a different perspective.

All requests for Wellness Workshops must have the approval of the board and therefore schools must be able to identify how the workshop will support their "School Development Plan". Requests for workshops will have to be submitted to board specialists for consideration based on different deadlines in accordance with the policies of your district. For the purpose of ensuring availability of the Employee Assistance Coordinators it is suggested that requests be submitted at least four weeks prior to the date you would like the workshop delivered. Ability to provide a workshop will be subject to the availability of an Employee Assistance Program Coordinator. As with most activities, workshops are provided on a "first come, first served" basis, therefore the earlier the request is received the better the chance that someone will be available. Wellness workshops can be delivered in a full day or half day time frame. The program will also deliver Wellness presentations in shorter duration but these presentations cannot include the same type of group discussion or interaction. It would be most cost effective for the program if schools within the same area could request workshops within the same time frame. This would allow the program's workshop budget to stretch further and meet more needs with the same dollars.

If you believe that a Wellness Workshop will be beneficial to your staff group, then it may be worthwhile to have the discussion with your colleagues and administration. Once you have a consensus from the group that this is something that everyone supports, then you will need to reach a consensus on which topic might be of most benefit to the group. After these decisions are made it is a matter of deciding who will submit the request to the board and then contact one of the two Employee Assistance Program Coordinators to tentatively book a date. A tentative date can be booked with the Coordinators prior to the final approval from your district. Wellness workshops are a positive way to take a preventative approach to healthy living, as opposed to waiting for problems to develop and dealing with the crisis that results.

Kathy Taylor-Rogers is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Kathy Taylor-Rogers (ext. 242) or Marie Wall (ext. 265).



Tax-Saving Strategies

by PAT HOGAN

Move to Nunavut – for New Year’s Eve! Imagine the following scene: you are attending a national meeting of teachers from across Canada. During a coffee break, a group of you is discussing teacher’s salaries and the tax hit imposed by different provinces. For discussion purposes, let’s say you are all comparing a teacher earning \$45,000 annually. The teacher from Newfoundland and Labrador tells the group his tax bill, based on the combined federal and provincial tax rates, comes to \$11,562. The teacher from Nunavut says his tax bill is \$8,506 – 27% less! Teachers from Ontario and British Columbia both come in at approximately \$9,367. The Quebec teacher says his tax bill is \$11,740!!

While we are not the worst (Quebec is the only province with a more onerous tax hit), it is apparent that your province of residence on December 31 has a critical bearing on your tax burden. So moving to Nunavut or any other province (except Quebec) would be to your advantage – from a purely tax point of view.

Tax Avoidance

This refers to any legitimate practice that a person uses to avoid taxes. This is *not* to be confused with tax evasion, which is illegal! Sad to say, there are only a few ways to legally avoid taxes. Some common examples would be:

- a) Profits from the sale of your principal residence are tax-exempt;
- b) The proceeds of a life insurance policy are tax-exempt;
- c) 50% of your investment returns from capital gains are exempt;
- d) Other miscellaneous items: lottery winnings, strike pay, GST benefit, Child Tax Benefit, winnings from gambling for enjoyment, social assistance payments, worker’s compensation payments – all are not included in income or are considered “non-taxable” income;
- e) Non-taxable benefits given to employees, e.g. financial counseling related to your retirement or re-employment, group insurance plans that your employer cost-shares, education/training courses related to your work, etc.

Tax Deferral

This refers to postponing the recognition of income and the resulting payment of income taxes. It has been compared to an interest-free loan from the Government. Examples would include:

- a) RRSP contributions are the best example of saving taxes by deferral. Investments grow tax-free, sheltered inside your RRSP until withdrawal later. There is no better tax break!
- b) You or your partner may have “unused RRSP contribution room” remaining from past years. This can be used now or carried forward indefinitely for future use.
- c) **Note:** Withdrawals from RRSPs should only be done with the knowledge that:
 - i) withdrawals are initially subject to a “withholding tax”; ii) withdrawals are then fully taxed on your tax

return at year's end; and iii) withdrawals (excluding the home-buyers and life-long learning plans) cannot be replaced later.

d) Timing your receipts (where possible) so that any gains are not reportable until some future time.

Note: For those who have contributed to their RRSPs to the maximum allowed, there are other ways to achieve tax deferral, notably by the use of an exempt “whole” or “universal” life insurance policy.

Tax Conversion

This refers to the practice of changing highly-taxed income into more favorably-taxed income in a lower tax bracket.

One obvious way is to “income split” with your spouse. Using a “spousal RRSP” would be a way of getting an asset into the hands of the lower-income partner (who has a lower tax bracket), where it will be taxed less heavily.

Another simple technique to achieve “income splitting” is for the higher income spouse to pay the household bills and any investing is done in the lower income spouse's name – where it is taxed at a lower rate.

Understanding Investment Basics

All investments are not created equal, despite the fact that they may produce the same before-tax dollars. The key question becomes: how do they compare in after-tax dollars?

There are three types of investment income. In the following three examples, assume: 1) \$100 is the investment income earned in each case; 2) Each investor's tax rate is 38% (22% federal tax plus 16% Nfld. tax).

a) Interest income is fully taxed 100% at your own tax rate. **Example:** Tom has a savings account in the bank and last year he earned \$100 interest. Within a 38% tax bracket, Tom will pay \$38 taxes and retain \$62.00.

b) Dividend income, earned from investment returns from the dividends declared on preferred shares, receives beneficial tax treatment through the use of the federal dividend tax credit. **Example:** Dick earned \$100 in dividends from his investment in preferred shares. Within a 38% tax bracket, Dick will pay \$30.83 in taxes and retain \$69.17.

c) Capital gains, earned from investment returns when the sale price of an asset exceeds its acquisition costs and base price. They are only 50% taxed at your own tax rate. **Example:** Harry earned \$100 in capital gains from selling some common shares and equity mutual funds he owned. Within his 38% tax bracket, he will pay \$19 tax and retain \$81.00.

So given a choice, you get to keep more after-tax dollars if you earn them as capital gains or dividends instead of interest income. *(cont'd.)*

HINT: If you have both RRSPs and non-registered accounts, it will save you taxes if you put your cash (money market) and fixed-income securities (bonds, GICs, etc.) inside the RRSP, and put your equity and dividend income investments outside your RRSP – in your non-registered accounts. By doing this, the RRSP will shelter your interest income, which otherwise would be most heavily taxed. The dividend income and capital gains will be taxed in your non-registered accounts but less heavily than otherwise.

If you have only RRSPs, you will probably hold cash, fixed income and equities in a balanced account with a diversified asset allocation reflecting your own investor profile. All are tax-sheltered.

Example: Chris and Caroline, young parents with a toddler, recently bought a house. Chris is the main breadwinner and Caroline works part-time. They want to maximize their after-tax income and use all the tax advantages they can. Their home purchase is a tax-free asset and an investment that will appreciate over time; it will remain tax-free as their principal residence even on its eventual sale (tax avoidance). Naming Caroline as the beneficiary of his life insurance policy will ensure she will collect any death benefit tax-free (tax avoidance).

They also are thinking of starting an RRSP (tax deferral) to augment their future pensions, save on present taxes and benefit from the growth potential of long-term compounding. They decide to use a “spousal RRSP” in Caroline’s name to avail of income-splitting later on withdrawal (tax conversion).

They also dream of a holiday trip to Tuscany in a few years and decide to start a special dedicated savings account. Such an account will be “non-registered” and its investment returns will be taxed annually, unlike their “registered” retirement savings plan.

They first discussed buying a Canada Savings Bond (which pays interest income) through payroll deduction, but are now considering a good quality, low-risk dividend or equity mutual fund, (which pays dividend income or capital gains). Such an investment vehicle has the potential for much higher returns and is taxed much more favorably. They are content to take on more risk with the mutual fund than with the safety of the bond. In return, the mutual fund will hopefully reward them with enhanced pre-tax performance and much better after-tax returns. Their final decision was to purchase the equity fund. It will be purchased (and its returns taxed) in Caroline’s name only as the lower income spouse.

It is worth pointing out that Caroline must earn a nominal 4% on her non-registered investment just to break even after her taxes and inflation are considered. Even if she is fortunate to earn 8%, this will be diluted down to a 2.8% return after taxes and inflation! Indeed,

taxes and inflation are the two demons that haunt every investor. They extract their toll in non-registered accounts annually and even in RRSP accounts eventually on withdrawal.

Income Tax Preparation

There are ways of reducing your taxes by paying particular attention to the annual preparation of your income tax returns.

a) Ensure you are taking advantage of all possible deductions. A deduction is claimed to reduce your taxable income. It’s an amount that is, in essence, not subject to tax. **Example:** Caroline’s Child Care Expenses claim for \$5,000 (assuming her 26% tax rate) will reduce her taxes and save her \$1,300. **Example:** Chris will claim his RRSP contribution to Caroline’s spousal plan on his tax return. His \$5,000 contribution will save him \$1,900 (assuming his 38% tax rate). So, the higher a taxpayer’s income (and tax rate), the more a tax deduction reduces his/her taxes.

To conclude, all deductions require an outlay of cash and the deductions only recover some of this outlay.

b) Are you using all available non-refundable credits? **Example:** Chris claims the interest on his student loan; Caroline claims the medical expenses as the lower-income spouse. Some credits can be transferred from family members, such as a spouse or a child attending university.

c) Using tax software, such as *QUICKTAX* or other products, can help you keep track of all the details, assist in determining who should claim the deduction or credit and prevent math errors too.

d) There are all kinds of special tax considerations for young parents, students, salespeople, employees, retirees, those experiencing marriage breakdown, the self-employed, seniors, investors, the disabled, etc.

e) Educate yourself on tax matters. Bookstores abound with books like Tim Cestnick’s *Winning the Tax Game, 2003* and many others.

Income taxes are the undisputed biggest expense in our personal finances throughout our lives. Any steps we can take to keep these expenses to a minimum will free us to maximize our ability to pursue other financial and personal goals. A Financial Security Advisor or Certified Financial Planner (CFP) can assist in finding ways to save you taxes.

Pat Hogan is a retired principal/teacher and life member of NLTA. He is now a licensed Financial Security Advisor with Facey Financial Planning & Consulting. Pat would welcome inquiries, with no obligation, at 709-754-2143 or email: hogan@roadrunner.nf.net.



4TH ANNUAL PROVINCIAL FAIR TEACHER RECRUITMENT

The Fair will profile job opportunities and related information for students, teachers or others interested in entry into the profession.



The Provincial Recruitment Fair is a project of the Provincial Advisory Group on Teacher Supply and Demand, in partnership with Memorial University of Newfoundland; the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association; Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; and the Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards Association.

For More Information contact:
Evelyn Bennett
Tel: 726-8144
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**Are you looking for a job in education?
Are you an Education graduate?
Substitute teacher?
Or looking for a career change?**

**The Provincial Teacher
Recruitment Fair is the place for you.**

**Date: Thursday, May 13, 2004
9:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.**

**Place: Memorial University Club,
5th Floor,
Arts and Administration Building
St. John's Campus of
Memorial University**

**Information booths will be
set up by**

- School Districts
- the NLTA
- Department of Education
- Faculty of Education *and other Educational Partners*





PRIMARY/ELEMENTARY SIC CONFERENCE

April 29-30, 2004

Hotel Marystown and Sacred Heart Elementary, Marystown. Keynote speakers: Miriam Treheame and Dr. Myrle Vokey. Details regarding sessions and presenters can be found at www.bpsb.nf.ca/cpet. For further information contact Theresa Jarvis, Tel: 709-891-6100, ext. 224, tjarvis@bpsb.nf.ca or Marlene Biggin, Tel: 709-891-6100, ext. 244, mbiggin@bpsb.nf.ca.

**CANADIAN COLLEGE OF TEACHERS
44TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

April 29 – May 1, 2004

Edmonton, AB. Theme: *Edmonton Schools, a prototype of programming mosaic*. Cost: \$250. For further information and registration contact Canadian College of Teachers, Box 57157, 2020 Sherwood Drive, Sherwood Park, AB, T8A 5L7, Fax: 780-922-2885, E-mail: hdj@shaw.ca.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

May 19-21, 2004

Battery Hotel, St. John's. Contact Linda Pike, Tel: 709-754-2440/41, Fax: 709-754-1805; E-mail: linda@ves.k12.nf.ca.

PALAEO WEEK FOR TEACHERS

July 19-23, 2004

Drumheller, AB. This year's program will have educators excavating dinosaur bones from a quarry that has yielded fossils from one of the largest types of duckbilled dinosaurs known. Working with Royal Tyrrell Museum educators and palaeontologists, teachers will get the latest scientific information available, and a host of resources to help them apply the information in the classroom. Cost: \$400 including taxes, program materials, field trips, lunches and educational resources. For information and details on registration visit www.tyrrellmuseum.com or call 403-823-7707.

PRACTICAL CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

August 17-18, 2004

St. John's. A two-day summer institute aimed at enhancing teachers' classroom discipline

techniques. Topics include: preventative discipline techniques; dealing with disruptive and defiant students; handling high level incidents in class; tracking behavior and communicating with administration. Location: MUN Arts Annex, Room 1043. Fee: \$100. Please make cheques payable to Practical Classroom Management Consulting, P.O. Box 2033, Pictou, Nova Scotia, B0K 1H0. Please attach mailing address, telephone info and e-mail with cheque. For further information e-mail pcmc@eastlink.ca.

TEACHER'S EDUCATION ADVENTURE

August 22-28, 2004

Learn the answers to many fascinating questions as you walk the Tablelands, peek into tide pools, and explore bogs, streams, and other wetlands in Gros Morne National Park. The Teacher's Education Adventure is offered by Parks Canada in partnership with the Department of Education, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, Newfoundland and Labrador School Districts, the Red Ochre Regional Economic Board and the Gros Morne Co-operating Association. Registration: \$350 per person (includes meals, accommodations at local motels, and travel during the Institute). For further information contact Dorothy Parsons, Education Specialist, Western Newfoundland and Labrador Field Unit, Parks Canada, Tel: 709-458-2417, Fax: 709-458-2059, E-mail: Dorothy.Parsons@pc.gc.ca.

MUSIC SPECIAL INTEREST COUNCIL CONFERENCE

October 21-23, 2004

Holiday Inn, St. John's. Contact Mary Dinn, President and Conference Chair, Tel: 709-745-1253 or e-mail: mdinn@roadrunner.nf.net.

S.M.A.R.T. (SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS ACCESSING RECENT TECHNOLOGY) T3 REGIONAL CONFERENCE

October 22-23, 2004

Fairmont Hotel, St. John's. For details, including online registration, contact the conference web site at www.stemnet.nf.ca/smart/.

NLTA

BRANCH ELECTIONS

MAY – JUNE 2004

- Would you like to be more involved in decisions affecting your professional and personal future?
- Do you feel you have skills or abilities which you can offer to your professional Association?
- Would you like to be more informed about, and involved in, the internal operations of your Association?

Then consider becoming a member of your branch leadership team by offering yourself for a position on the branch executive when branch elections are held this spring. **Contact a member of your branch executive or your NLTA School Representative for more details.**

Dates to Remember

April 2004

- Apr 30 **Deadline:** Deferred Salary Leave Applications
- Apr 30 **Deadline:** Year-end resignation from contract

May 2004

- May 7 **Deadline:** Notification by Board of layoff
- May 9-15 Branch Election Week
- May 20 **Deadline:** PD Fund applications

June 2004

- June 11-12 NLTA Executive Meeting
- June 15 **Deadline:** Notification by board of acceptance/rejection of Deferred Salary Leave requests

