

You're Worth It: Cynthia Pickering wants to manage your life

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Does this sound familiar? "Time is so tight. It seems wherever I am I should really be somewhere else. Everything is such a rush."

That quote is from a Health Canada study in 2001 on the challenges of work/family balance. More than half of the participants felt pulled like taffy, trying to be the best possible employee while devoting themselves wholly to home and family. The study reported that 56% of employees felt physical or emotional fatigue and a sense of being "time crunched."

Enter Cynthia Pickering, whose brainchild Time Is Money Executive Concierge Inc. picks up day-to-day tasks so clients can concentrate on the big stuff. "The tiny tasks add up," she says, which is one of the reasons why she decided early in 2005 to create a service which provides some relief from the sense of juggling 10 tasks at once. "There's a real emphasis on the work/life balance," Pickering says. And when an employee runs short of time outside work, personal time will sneak onto the company books. "I've found in my research that the average employee wastes between three to five hours of company time per week on personal tasks. Think about a company with 100 employees; with 1,000 employees ... how much time is that lost per year?"

While everyone wants someone to help with mundane or time-consuming tasks, few can afford the luxury, or so it would seem. Not so, says Pickering. With three tiers of service, her assistance starts at \$65 per hour. She also provides memberships, which allow a client access to premium services with little or no notice required.

Pickering herself knows what it's like to be a busy young professional. Not too long ago she could be found working as a credit analyst in the energy industry. When she decided to try her hand at something new, the challenge was finding something that suited her personality: organized, "very particular," she laughs, and yet creative, willing to look beyond the obvious. "When you see someone's face or hear in their voice that you've decreased their stress level, that's amazing," she says.

While Pickering offers her services on a corporate level (a relatively common practice at the headquarters of American firms such as Texas Instruments), the clients Pickering says are most in need of her services in Calgary are individuals with demanding careers who want to balance their professional responsibilities with quality personal time. One of her favourite clients is a "young CEO" who is in the process of relocating to Calgary from the United States. Pickering has been helping him organize not only the nuts and bolts of relocation but also his most pressing concern: how to bring his vehicles into Canada. "He has more than one car, and we've been doing all the time-consuming tasks involved, such as the telephone research and forms gathering," she says.

Right now, she's working on finding him the "perfect residence," and, because she insists on getting to know her clients and their lifestyle, she's perfectly equipped to understand his needs. "He travels extensively, so he needs someone to make sure he has groceries when he gets home. He needs a reliable cleaning service and he needs someone to help him plan dinner parties for when he is home," Pickering lists off. But, because she's taken the time to get to know her client, she can plan all those things with ease. "I want to be able to see the world through their eyes," she says.

Cait Wills

