

Announcer: Hello and welcome to the CPA Australia podcast. Your weekly source for accounting, education, career and leadership discussion.

Sarah Jones: Hello and welcome to this podcast where we will be discussing work-life balance. Today I would like to introduce our guest speaker Professor Anne Bardoel. Anne Bardoel is a professor of the Department of Management and Marketing at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. Previously, she has held positions as a member of the Australian Government's workplace gender equality agency advisory group, Victorian government's working families Council, and president of the Work Life Association Australia.

Sarah Jones: In these roles, she's actively promoted discussion among business leaders and policymakers about work-life issues. Her teaching experiences reflected in the range of units she has taught which include organisational behaviour, human resource management and business communication, and work, family and life. Welcome Anne.

Anne Bardoel: Thank you, Sarah. It's absolutely a pleasure to be here.

Sarah Jones: Well, philosopher Alain de Botton may have declared that there's no such thing as work-life balance, everything worth fighting for unbalances your life. What do you think, Anne?

Anne Bardoel: It's a really interesting quote, that one, and to a certain extent, I understand where he's coming from. That often things that are really important in our life do require some sacrifices. And in that sense, we tend to focus on them and not think about issues to do with work-family and work-life balance.

Anne Bardoel: When you sort of said the question I was reflecting on when I did my PhD, and I had two young children, a little bit like yourself. And it was a time that it was something that was really important to me and I wanted to get done, but it did actually impinge on my time with my two young girls at the time and obviously my partner. But at the same time, you can still try and create balance within those busy times. So for me, one of the things my husband and I decided is that we would have dinner with each other once a week, every Thursday night. And we'd always get a babysitter for the kids and that was something. So even though I was really busy, you can still create that sense of having some sense of harmony between your work, your life, and your family.

Sarah Jones: Yes. I tend to agree with that.

Anne Bardoel: And I think it's sort of reflecting a consciousness about how you spend your time and what's important to you. So to me it's not about just ignoring important things, they often ... I'm not going to sugarcoat it, they do require some sacrifices those dreams that we might have in terms of our career and our work, but it doesn't mean that you can't then also be conscious of the important things in your life.

- Sarah Jones: How would you describe work-life balance? And does it have a different meaning for different people?
- Anne Bardoel: Really, it's a question that I often get asked because I do a lot of research in this area. Look, one of the things I would say is yes, it does have a lot of different meanings for different people. And one of the most important aspects of that is work-life balance changes at different stages of our life. So my work-life balance when I was sort of in your position of having two very young children is different from what it is now when I have two young adult children. The things that are important that I can concentrate have actually changed as we go through life.
- Anne Bardoel: And I think there is a problem with the term work-life balance, it sort of implies that there's some magical, you've got a set of scale, and if you can somehow balance it up, you hit this magical spot. That doesn't necessarily actually occur. But it is, I suppose, a sense of having some harmony between the multiple aspects that make up our life, and that's career, it's family, it's hobbies, it's community, and sensing that I've got some harmony in that sense.
- Sarah Jones: What is the result of current academic research on work-life balance, and how can this be employed in the real life and how does Australia compared to other countries, potentially Western countries like the UK and the US?
- Anne Bardoel: There's a couple of things that are really different in terms of the Australian situation and one of those issues is that Australia has one of the highest participation of people in the part time workforce, and most of those people who participate in the part time workforce are women. So the Australian model, if you like, is that women tend to work part time for the first five years of the children's life. That is quite unique to Australia. I think the Netherlands is the only other country that's higher than us.
- Anne Bardoel: In the United States, you wouldn't get anywhere near that level of part time participation in the labour force. So sometimes it's referred to the one and a half worker model. So one was traditionally the male in the family works full time and the female works part time. And that's how families if you like, try and work out that balance between having young children and both people being in the workforce.
- Anne Bardoel: There are some other things that are I suppose similar, but are different. Australia's followed the UK model with the legislation about the right to request flexibility. So in Australia, we have, and I sometimes think people don't know about this, but if you have young children under the age of five or children who have a disability or elderly relatives who need care, you have the right to request flexibility. The employer is obliged to listen to that conversation, not automatically grant it, but they can reject it on business grounds. So that's another thing we've tended to copy. Well, not copy, but we've taken on from the experience, particularly in the UK.

Anne Bardoel: The other thing I'll say about the Australian experience is that we tend to have ... If we're looking at the OECD, we tend to have fairly long working hours, particularly in the professional working area. Only, I think Japan and the United States are the only other countries that have high than we are. But if I reflect on that situation, when you sort of ... A very interesting study done by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which shows those people who work ...

Anne Bardoel: We have a high percentage in Australia, particularly amongst the professional workforce, who work on what we call long, extended hours. So that's classified as anything over 45-50 hours. Those people are reporting less satisfaction at work, and they're also wanting to work less hours. So it does tie in with the group of people that this podcast is going out to. We know that there are people working very, very long hours, and they would like to work less.

Sarah Jones: Do you think, I'm just going to maybe I've got a couple of things off the back of that, but the first one, I know some of the other industries and this is completely different to accounting, but say hospitality, there's been a lot of backlash against particularly chefs working 80 hour weeks, being underpaid and so forth. But nothing like that. Do you think anything like that will ever happen within corporate world?

Sarah Jones: Because I guess they're not technically being underpaid, they have a salary, but that's very similar to say chefs, and ...

Anne Bardoel: I think it's a good point that you raise. I think there already is a certain backlash. I think we're seeing the current generation of young men and women that are coming into the workforce are expecting to have the ability to balance their work and their personal life. More so than perhaps my generation. There is an expectation, they've seen their parents, the baby boomers, working incredibly long hours and they're saying, "I don't necessarily want to work that same hours."

Anne Bardoel: The other thing I think that's, and you've hit the nail on the head, that what we find with the professional workforce is that it's a salaried workforce that doesn't get paid overtime, but there is, with the sort of work that's being done, it's very hard to contain it and limit that time. There's always more work that can actually be done.

Sarah Jones: Be done, yes, yep.

Anne Bardoel: Even working in hospitality in one sense, probably a chef's a little bit different, but if you've got a shift, you've got a shift and at the end of it, you can go home and basically forget about your work. Whereas often the work you're doing in a professional environment, if it's a project, it's still going on in your head when you go home. It's hard to actually leave it.

Sarah Jones: Yeah, that's a very good point. What about men? Are they going part time, or is it mostly women? [crosstalk 00:09:48]-

Anne Bardoel: I'd have to say that what the figures show us, what the Australian Bureau of Statistics show us is that it's mostly women. There are men that go part time, but very few of them. What we do know, a male goes part time in the workforce, it's generally speaking to take on additional study, education or improve their education qualifications. Women, if you ask them, the reason why women go part time is because they're trying to balance their work with their family life, and particularly with young children.

Anne Bardoel: There's actually different reasons why men and women go part time, but it's definitely much more women. Many more women go part time than men. But having said that, there is a slight uptick in the number of men.

Sarah Jones: Men, okay. I've got, this is a personal experience, a few friends, and you've just made me think about this, that are the breadwinners. They earn more than their husbands. Maybe not significantly, but enough for them to go back to work full time quite early after the child's birth, so maybe between three and six months. Whereas I notice, and again this is my own personal experience with people that I know, if the man is the main breadwinner, then yes, the woman will wait maybe at least one year, maybe two or three. If they have another one, they might even wait five or more.

Sarah Jones: Or, they'll go back part time after a year or two, but the ones that are the breadwinners, their husband doesn't necessarily take anytime off work. They'll just have their two weeks and they'll end up going back full time quite early. Is there any research ... I mean, is that, research in that space?

Anne Bardoel: There is, and I can't quote the exact figures, but there is I think starting to become increasing more acceptance of men taking more time-

Sarah Jones: More time, yep.

Anne Bardoel: ... to be with their children than there has been. When we look at the legislated parental leave, it's parental leave. It's not maternity leave. Couples can decide between each other as to who's going to take that leave.

Sarah Jones: Maybe they're taking leave versus going back to how where the men are taking part time roles. Maybe they're taking more leave versus-

Anne Bardoel: I mean, you can take paternity leave which is fairly small, but you can actually opt to take, as a male, you can actually opt to take parental leave. What we do know is most men don't do it. Even in the Scandinavian countries, like a country like Sweden, which has one of the most progressive policies in terms of encouraging both men and women to take parental leave, you'll still find many men don't take that parental leave, to the point now that what Sweden's

actually introduced is if you do not take that parental leave as a male, at least three months of it, you just lose it.

Anne Bardoel: That's encouraging men to actually take that leave, that wasn't a way of I suppose a policy lever to try and encourage people to take the leave.

Sarah Jones: Okay. The next question is around career progression and whether taking work-life balance options, whether it's part time or working from home, or any other sort of flexibility option that a workplace might offer, do you think that impacts or does the research suggest that that impacts how people progress through their career? Do they stay stagnant in that same role? Are employers starting to give those part time workers, given there's so many of them now, career progression avenues?

Anne Bardoel: There's good and bad news on that front. Certainly some research indicates there are career penalties. The mommy penalty, if you like, for taking time out of work. I suppose it really depends on the organisation that you work for. I think we're increasingly seeing organisations that 50% of graduates coming from a business school, for example, like I work in Swinburne, are going to be women. They're employed, at some stage many of those are going to have children, and so what do you say to that group of highly trained, highly skilled people? "You're not valuable."

Anne Bardoel: So, organisations are recognising that workforces are becoming more diverse, that people come to workforce with, they can't leave their family at the door if you like. So, recognising the more progressive organisations are recognising, "Well, how do we retain that talent pool of women?" Or men, for that matter, who want to actually spend some time with their children. So, we see, I was reading a report the other day, it was from the UK actually, talking about a number of accounting firms are offering a part time career track to be a partner of the accounting firm, which certainly wasn't there 20 years ago.

Anne Bardoel: There's this, a recognition that we need to think a little bit out of the box in terms of how we provide flexibility for people at different stages of their life, who are totally committed to having a career, but need to have some flexibility at certain points in order to stay in their profession.

Sarah Jones: I'm actually, just made me think of a conversation I had with a partner of an accounting firm. I won't say which one.

Anne Bardoel: Probably best not to.

Sarah Jones: And they do offer some, I think some leave for dads or extended leave. He said, "Look, it's all lovely on paper, but the reality of it is that they still tend to promote the people that are there five days a week in the office." Is there a bit of a conflict between what's actually on paper, and the practises ... It's probably more cultural, isn't it? [crosstalk 00:16:33]-

Anne Bardoel: Yeah, it is. Look, as I said before, I won't sugarcoat it. There are some organisations that if you indicate that you have any other life outside that organisation, you're going to suffer career penalties or stigma, if you like. But I think that is changing. I'm not saying that it's changing quickly, but we are seeing both men and women who want to have a better life, if you like, more integrated life in terms of their personal life and their family life and their work life.

Anne Bardoel: They are serious about their careers but sometimes they need that flexibility. But a lot of organisations are still built around the premise that you leave your home life at the door as you walk in. That's just not the reality for most people. It can't be achieved. Sometimes the flexibility that people need isn't enormous. It might be, "Look, I need to leave." For example, one of the women that I work with, she leaves work at 4:00 so she can do the school pickup, but she does another hour or two at night. And that works for her, she's really happy to do that.

Anne Bardoel: In fact, on her email it says, "If I'm sending you an email late at night, please don't feel you have to respond. It's just the way that I manage my own work and personal life." There are different ways that we can actually do that, that don't necessarily require huge changes by people. Interestingly, smaller firms actually that research will indicate are often better at providing a better work-life balance for their employees.

Anne Bardoel: One of the reasons, you're working in a small firm of 5-10 people, everyone knows each other, they know you've got kids or you've got a father who's got dementia and needs a bit of assistance. Often that flexibility is what sometimes referred to as at need flexibility. When you need it, you actually get it. I think sometimes when we design policies and programmes, there can be all of these great policies and programmes, and I'm not discounting, they certainly have a benefit, no question about that.

Anne Bardoel: But sometimes the changes or the support doesn't need to be some massive thing. The other thing is one thing that comes very clearly through the research is your immediate manager is often the most important thing in terms of whether you feel you have some sense of, for want of a better term, work-life balance. If that person you feel comfortable about having flexible, having some flexibility in the way you arrange your work with your family or your personal life or your community life or whatever it is, that's a huge thing.

Anne Bardoel: But the other side of that is if you were given that flexibility, we know from the research that you're often more engaged and satisfied in your work as well. It's a two-way street. It's not just about the employer giving everything to the employee. It's also that if you are a good manager, if you do help people, see them as the whole person if you like, you get that back in terms of engagement.

Sarah Jones: That's very interesting. Why do you think many professionals struggle with work-life balance?

Anne Bardoel: There's a whole range of reasons here. Often professionals are high achievers, they're really committed to their work. They've done university degrees, they've put a lot of investment into what they're doing, and they want to have career paths. But they go into an organisation where often you see the people who are having the career paths are the person that's still there at 8:00 or 9:00 at night.

Anne Bardoel: There's that aspect that we still find in a lot of organisations that the leaders of those organisations aren't necessarily the best role models in terms of being able to have work-life balance. I think the other thing is the nature of the work that people do. So, it's difficult, if you think, some jobs you can, for example, my younger daughter worked in a café. She had long shifts but at the end of that shift, she could turn off, it was free time.

Anne Bardoel: Sometimes we're doing projects where it's actually different, difficult to turn off. Or the client might be ringing you out of hours, and this is the good thing and bad thing about technology, that we're all now constantly contactable and we feel we need to respond, and things like that. You've got those sorts of pressures, and it reminds me, your question reminds me, last Saturday night I was walking past a major consulting company office and I won't say who it was, and here is the Uber Eats person with 15 boxes of pizzas. It's a Saturday night, it's 7:00 p.m. at night and I'm thinking, "All those people that are in there, they're obviously having to do an all weekend stint because somebody's probably rung up at 5:30 on Friday night and said, 'I need this done by Monday morning.'"

Anne Bardoel: We have those sorts of aspects. I remember somebody describing that often when we work, for some organisations we're being paid a lot but we also do a deal with the devil. We're paid a lot, but the expectation is we're going to work these long hours. It's really, it's a difficult balance.

Sarah Jones: Do you think part of it's about setting some sort of expectation with your manager or your employer, as well?

Anne Bardoel: Yeah.

Sarah Jones: Because sometimes my own personal experience, I have worked at one particular company when I was quite young, I'd only been to maybe four years out of university. I'd just moved to London, and 100 hours, but I went on holiday. It was a contract, I went away and then I came back and said, "Look." They wanted me to come back, I said, "I'm happy to come back, but I'm working 9:00 until 6:00 or 7:00, I'm not working until 2:00 a.m., 10:00 on the weekends." They were actually fine with that, but I think ... I continued, that taught me a very good lesson that if I actually set expectations when I come into a workplace and what can be done within certain periods, this is probably not always true, but that served me quite well.

- Sarah Jones: But I think a younger person, or me as a younger person, I was more likely to just go with the flow because you're new, you're trying to impress, you're trying to yeah, get your place in the organisation. I think as you progress in your career, for me, definitely, yeah, I'm much more confident to say, "Do we need to do it tonight? Can't it be done tomorrow?" That type of thing.
- Anne Bardoel: I think that's a really good point. Those conversations with our managers or bosses are often difficult to have, particularly when you're new and fairly junior in the workforce. But I think if it is getting out of hand, I mean to me, 100 hour week, a constant 100 hour week, that's just crazy. Plenty of research shows that people cannot be productive continually working those sorts of hours.
- Anne Bardoel: They make mistakes, there are other things, people leave because they don't want to work under those conditions anymore. We know that turnover is costly. In the professional space, that generally speaking you can, a person's annual salary is the cost of what it costs to replace them. By the time you've trained somebody else in to take their position, and there's gaps and all of that sort of stuff.
- Anne Bardoel: You don't want people to actually leave the organisation. I think your example of setting expectations is a really important one, and having some voice in the workplace about those things. I think that's a realistic thing that you said to your manager, "Look, I can't continue on this. These are the boundaries." I think that's perfectly appropriate to do. It's often not an easy conversation, but it's an important conversation.
- Anne Bardoel: And the other thing is, sometimes people say, "We need this done. It's got to be done overnight." Well, does it really need to be? Nobody minds pulling the late nighter every now and again, but if it's all the time, that everything's always urgent, then to me there's an issue in terms of planning. But the other side of it is, and I'm looking at it from the employer point of view, if that's the default, that we just keep pushing our staff to work incredibly long hours, people get burned out. They get stressed and we're potentially liable for stress claims and at the very least, people just leaving the organisation, or just starting to tune out. Because they can't cope with it anymore.
- Announcer: If you're liking this episode so far, visit [InTheBlack.com](http://InTheBlack.com). InTheBlack.com is a leading source of information on business, finance, and accounting analysis and commentary, with articles on the accounting firm that works a five hour day, and the top eight issues facing accounting practises today. You'll find ideas to help your career and work life. Now, back to the episode.
- Sarah Jones: Are there any gender considerations in work-life balance? With male and female, do they expect different things when they talk about work-life balance?
- Anne Bardoel: Yes, and no. We do know that young women, if I ask the young women that I teach at Swinburne do they expect to have a career, they'll all say yes, so they



have the same dreams as young men in terms of what they do. Where the differences often are is in our societal norms and expectations, and how they play out as an undercurrent in society and workforces. One of them, what we call is the motherhood norm. As women, we're expected to be the carers, and to provide care for children and elderly people, at a societal level.

Anne Bardoel: Men, at a societal level, are often expected to be the breadwinners, those people. Even though that might not apply to an individual, those sort of norms are often playing out in society. So, if a man ... I'll give you an example. This is years ago, I used to work for one of the banks, and I was at a meeting. I had young children at the time, and I had the guy nextdoor to ... It was obvious that the meeting was going to go past 6:00 p.m. and I had the guy nextdoor to me, in the next week, whisper to me, he said, "Could you tell everyone that you need to go home to pick up your children?"

Anne Bardoel: I said, "Well, I don't actually," because my husband happened to be doing it. I said, "But why?" He goes, "Well, I need to go." I said, "Well, why can't you ask?" He said, "I just don't feel comfortable." It was a really classic example of he felt that he didn't want to actually admit that he had caring responsibilities, so men can often, it's often hard, more difficult for men to admit those responsibilities or they feel uncomfortable. Whereas he expected that it would be a lot more comfortable for me to do that.

Sarah Jones: Yeah, that's really interesting.

Anne Bardoel: Yeah. We have these different expectations that often we, that are part of our socialisation and what we learn right from the beginning and what expectations are. That's one of the gender differences that I see. But as I mentioned before, we know in Australia that women tend to work part time when they have young children. That's just something that comes through time and time again in the statistics.

Anne Bardoel: I think from, I mean what's the lesson for Australia? Do we make career paths for people who are going part time? I think that's what we need to do. Because otherwise we're just losing a resource that's ... Or, not taking advantage-

Sarah Jones: Advantage of the resource. And it's actually good news, though, that Australia does offer so many part time roles. I know from my experience in the UK, there was no part time women or men working within the finance or banking industry. I didn't see one part timer, so it's quite amazing that Australian banks or financial services and probably many other corporates are offering these part time roles.

Sarah Jones: The only thing that I have noticed, I've been back in Australia three years, and I think we touched on this slightly before, I've had to network to get my part time role. I've noticed that many women that they're full time, they can go back part

time, whether it's one, two, three days a week. But to actually find that type of role, it's not advertised.

Anne Bardoel: No, I agree. There's a couple of things about the whole part time experience that we have in the Australian context. One yes, it's important, I think to offer career paths for women or men for that matter, who want to reduce their time in the workforce in order to either look after kids or other family members. That's becoming more of an issue in Australia with the ageing population as well.

Anne Bardoel: That's an important thing. The downside of working part time is we see women have less superannuation at the end of their working lives than men. That's one downside, because that part's not being paid in at the same level. So, do we think about that issue? The other issue with part time work and what we still find comes through certainly in some of the research, is women saying, "Yes, I've got a part time role but it's not a real role. I'm outside of the main operational area where I'm going to get opportunities for a promotion."

Anne Bardoel: That's I think an area that we need to work on in terms of if it's going to be part time, let's create a part time stream where women actually, and men who work part time, are still going to be part of a career path for those people. The other thing that I think you picked up on, and I totally agree, we don't see part time roles often advertised unless it's a parental leave, short term placement. It might be then.

Anne Bardoel: I think that's a real scope for many of those organisations in the financial services. Many great women out there, many great men who want to work part time, and let's think about providing that part time career path.

Sarah Jones: Yeah, I think that's a great point.

Anne Bardoel: I think when we were chatting before, you were talking about, well how can part time work take place? Can we make it intensive days? You do three really intensive days and then you have two days clear. There's different ways that we can think about how that part time work occurs.

Sarah Jones: Yes, yep. Particularly in professional roles where you'll end up working probably more than the standard hours, and if you want the days off to be with your children, or if you're looking after a parent or whatever it is that you're doing, at least you can contain the work within those three days or perhaps do a few hours on the other days when it suits you.

Anne Bardoel: I think we need to think about how those flexible work arrangements can work for people who want to combine their work and their family and their personal lives. While we've been concentrating on people with family commitments, we also know that people have other commitments out there. It might be in terms

of community activity or it might be in terms of other life things that are important to them. Whether it be in terms of hobbies or sport, for example.

Sarah Jones: What do you think of, are there any, just looking at the other end, like retirees that want to work, or not retirees, but-

Anne Bardoel: People at the end of their work life.

Sarah Jones: ... [inaudible 00:34:09] work life that potentially want to scale back, maybe work two or three days a week as well?

Anne Bardoel: That's a really interesting question that you've asked me, because I was doing some research, this was just for an individual company, and one of the things that they'd found from their own, looking at doing their own demographic analysis on their workplace is that they had around about 40% of their workforce was due to retire in the next five years. I was thinking, "While we might want to lose some of them, we certainly don't want to lose all of them" because there's a lot of knowledge tied up in that group of the workforce, a lot of experience, et cetera.

Anne Bardoel: They actually surveyed the over 50 group in the workforce, expecting that most people would want to reduce their work hours. There was certainly, probably most of those people did, around about 50% said that they wanted to ... They'd love to continue working, but they wanted to reduce their work hours. Whether it was two or three days.

Anne Bardoel: The other thing that was reported is they wanted flexibility, because often some of those people were grandparents and wanted to have more time with their own grandchildren, and were often providing support for their own children who were in professional jobs as well. But the other thing that came out from this particular survey which I found was really interesting, and that is around about 30% said, "No, no, no. We're really happy to keep working. The kids are gone, we don't have those commitments that we used to have, but what we would like is to be able to take three months off a year and do the grey nomad trip around Australia."

Anne Bardoel: They wanted actually larger chunks of time off, not necessarily part time work. There were people who wanted part time work, but there was actually around about 30% of them-

Sarah Jones: Oh okay. So they just wanted more leave?

Anne Bardoel: Yeah, they wanted to have-

Sarah Jones: Which makes sense.

- Anne Bardoel: ... more leave. They were actually quite happy to work long work hours which was quite interesting. I think one of the things that comes through in the research is the whole issue of that we now have a very multi-generational workforce, with people who have different needs. Somebody in their 50s-60s, that end of the career is quite different from Generation X and Generation Y and the millennials that we see. There are different sets of work-life needs, depending on your age group. I think the question you asked at the beginning is what does work-life balance mean? Well, it depends what stage of your life you're at.
- Anne Bardoel: But coming back to that question, the other aspect of it, which I didn't touch on, which I've just thought about, was we know that people will have different styles of being able to balance their work and their personal life. So, one style is called the segmentation style. Those are the people that can totally segment their work. I go to work, I do work, I go home, and I just totally tune out. When I'm at home, I have the family or personal life and I'm totally focused on that.
- Anne Bardoel: A more common way we're seeing is people are what's called integrated, so they're at work, and they're thinking about their family or thinking about that and they're at home and they're doing work. This is becoming perhaps more prevalent because of technology. We're always contactable.
- Anne Bardoel: There are another group of people that are called cyclers, and they go ... It's often with work that's seasonal. In one sense, accounting is like that. There's a huge pressure at the end of the financial year, so they're totally committed to work at certain periods and then they pull back from that work. So there's different ways for different individuals, actually.
- Sarah Jones: Yeah, I'd say a lot of accountants are probably like that, actually. They're month end, so they've got a busy period over the month end, and the year end, and maybe reg reporting, and then maybe they take, I don't know, take some less pressured days during the months, or yeah.
- Anne Bardoel: I think that's where the good managers can be really good. If you know that your team's had a really tough week, let them have the day off during the week. Let them recover, if they've had to pull-
- Sarah Jones: The all nighter.
- Anne Bardoel: ... the all nighter or whatever it is. I'm not advocating all nighters, but okay sometimes we do have times when something does have to get done. But let's think about well how can we help-
- Sarah Jones: Each other, yes.
- Anne Bardoel: ... more people in terms of recognise, "Okay, that person has had to work really long hours. Let's give them a day off or let's give them more flexibility in the

next week when we know we're not going to have to work those particular crazy hours."

Sarah Jones: What do you think some of the key things that we should be looking for in a company that's promoting work-life balance if we were looking for flexibility options, what would we look for as a company?

Anne Bardoel: Okay. I just want to say that Sarah has just had to send a text message to arrange her family, which I think is absolutely fantastic, in the middle of a podcast. Okay, I shall answer the question now. Look, good question. I think one of the things, three main things I think companies need to really think about in terms of this whole area. One is embrace flexi-time. We know that young people are expecting to have more flexible work.

Anne Bardoel: It'll be different for different companies, and different organisations. Think about what that flexibility looks like. Is it flexible start or finish times? Or, is it in terms of having longer working days, or condensed work weeks, or whatever it be? There are multiple ways that we can provide flexible work arrangements, and it's about actually asking people and finding out what they actually need.

Anne Bardoel: Sometimes what they need isn't actually a huge thing. Often it's about flexibility when somebody actually needs that flexibility.

Sarah Jones: Sorry, just to interrupt you there, do you think especially if you're new to an organisation, do you think people have the confidence to ask for those options? Like, when they've just started, or if they're going for the job. Because I'd say, I know from my personal experience, I'd probably not ask straight away. I'd probably say, "Yep, I can do it" and then once I've gotten into the role, because ... Or not over-commit myself, but yeah, just in case, if you were being interviewed, someone say, "Well, you've got this person that wants flexible hours and blah, blah, blah, and then we've got this person who's the same, but is happy to be here-

Anne Bardoel: Or you think is happy to be here-

Sarah Jones: ... happy to be here, yes.

Anne Bardoel: ... all the time.

Sarah Jones: All the time, yeah.

Anne Bardoel: I think this is where as a potential employee, you've got to do your homework on the organisation. If you can, talk to people. The one time you have a little bit of negotiation time is when you've actually been offered the job. I think that's the time that you can actually start that conversation. You've got to take it at that time.

Anne Bardoel: That would be when I'd be, if for example you're a young parent and you need to drop off your child in the morning or pick them up at night, whatever it be, that's when you need to have those discussions with your employee. They've already committed, they've already offered you the job. Just as you would talk about pay, you talk about those conditions. That's what I would encourage people to do.

Anne Bardoel: I don't think that's actually unreasonable, and to be realistic, but also do ... I mean, there are some companies we know don't treat their employees particularly well. If that's the case, then maybe you need to take a second thought about joining it, or maybe you say to yourself, "I'm willing to work for them for two years but that's it, because I want to get the experience."

Anne Bardoel: So, you take quite a pragmatic approach to it. But in terms of the question, I think organisations need to embrace flexible work arrangements. The other thing is, the downside of technology is we're also always contactable, but I think we need to support telecommuting options. It's not always necessary to do work at the office. We can be much more productive, for some tasks, at home. If we're writing a report or doing some research for a particular deal or whatever, it's great to be able to work. If your home environment is one that's suitable for that, it's great to be able to have that flexibility to sometimes work at home.

Anne Bardoel: I think the other thing is to also, to try and develop or promote a culture within the company or the team where we encourage efficient work, not just work and face time for the sake of it. That what we're interested in is doing a good job. Let's do it efficiently, but if it's done, we don't have to sit at our desk until 8:00 p.m. because the boss is still there. It's done. That's sometimes a difficult thing, but that would be what I [crosstalk 00:44:01].

Sarah Jones: I think from my own personal experience, I think sometimes it is very much leered from the top, isn't it?

Anne Bardoel: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Jones: If you have a boss, or someone in a senior position that works very long hours, you can sense that the team is almost a bit nervous to leave early because [crosstalk 00:44:26]-

Anne Bardoel: Exactly, and that's why I said before-

Sarah Jones: It's cultural.

Anne Bardoel: ... what the research shows time and time again is your immediate boss is often the key determinant of whether or not you're going to feel that you have access to flexible work arrangements, or you feel satisfied with your own work-life balance.

Sarah Jones: The only other thing that comes to mind off the back of that conversation is what about younger people? I mean, I know retirees or people coming to the end of their careers potentially are looking for more flexible work options, but do you think the culture will start to change as millennials come through the senior positions?

Anne Bardoel: Look, I do. I see it in terms of the students that I teach, I see young men who are much more interested in being more actively involved in their own children's life at an early life, compared to when I think, I had a great father, loved him dearly, but that wasn't the thing at that time for fathers to be really involved. I see that much more, there's an expectation.

Anne Bardoel: And also for couples to expect that they're going to have a true partnership in terms of the way that they bring up their children and to have that total involvement by both people. The other thing I would say is, I touched on it before, but we have an ageing population in Australia. There's going to be more pressure, people are living longer, there's going to be more pressure on the generations coming through to look after elderly parents. Whether that person lives in an aged care facility, you still want to see them, and you're still responsible for them, and to provide that support.

Anne Bardoel: I see that as something that's also going to be on the horizon. Something that I've just experienced myself. My mother just passed away recently from Alzheimer's, but it was-

Sarah Jones: Sorry to hear that.

Anne Bardoel: Yeah, it's difficult. But I also needed to spend time with her as well. Often that time could be unexpected, that I had to go and see her.

Sarah Jones: Go and see her, yep. Finally, thanks very much for all the information so far, it's been brilliant, could you make some suggestions for CPA members out there, how to reach a work-life balance? We've probably touched on a number of those already, but do you have any recommendations?

Anne Bardoel: Look, there's a couple of things. These are going to apply to people at different points, but one bottom line thing is I'd say always put your health first. Taking care of yourself is particularly important, so if you're getting burned out, you really need to take stock of that. You might have heard the story about the frog and the boiling water, I'm not sure if you've heard about that, but if you throw a frog into boiling water, it immediately jumps out because it knows it.

Anne Bardoel: But if you put the frog in cold water, and gradually heat that up, the frog gets boiled to death because it doesn't know it's got to jump out. Ask yourself, "Am I in that situation? Am I the frog that's been gradually heated up and going to be boiled to death?" We don't want that sort of situation. I think the other thing, particularly for the group that may listen to this podcast, is let go of perfection.

Anne Bardoel: Often you just can wear yourself out and become impatient with others. Sometimes things, I know there was certain times in my life, particularly when I was doing my PhD, when the house didn't have to be that tidy. I could just let things go a little bit in terms of that. Let go, sometimes we need to let go of the fact that we can do it all. We can do it all at once. Sometimes you can't. You've just got to take a little bit of a step back, and people know when that period is, I think.

Anne Bardoel: Look for the good times, look for the humour in life, and the final thing that I think's really, really important is pay attention to those people in your life who are important.

Sarah Jones: That's the end of our podcast today. Thanks Anne for coming in. I've really enjoyed our conversation. It's been really insightful. It's actually my first podcast and I must say I've actually really enjoyed it, after being a little bit nervous to start off with. Thanks again, I've really enjoyed the conversation.

Anne Bardoel: Oh, thanks Sarah. I really enjoyed the conversation too, and thank you for inviting me and thank you also for sharing your experiences as well. It's been great.

Announcer: Thanks for listening to the CPA Australia podcast. For more information on today's episode, please visit the show notes at [www.cpaaustralia.com.au/podcast](http://www.cpaaustralia.com.au/podcast). Never miss an episode by subscribing to our podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Stitcher.