

Workplace flexibility leads to better employees

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Post-Bulletin

By Nancy Domaille and David Oeth

Congratulations and kudos to the nine Rochester area companies who met the high standards of the 2008 Alfred P. Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility, and the seven who received honorable mentions.

These businesses have distinguished themselves as leading practitioners of workplace flexibility in Rochester and across the nation. As cutting edge organizations, their leaders know their success is dependent on having a skilled and committed work force. Retention and recruitment of top talent and investment in today's work force pays dividends now and in the future.

Over half of the companies who earned the impressive Sloan Award and honorable mentions are also members of the First Steps Business Alliance, a coalition of local businesses that support school readiness in our community. Whether large or small, together or solo, these businesses, with the assistance of the First Steps Initiative at the Rochester Area Foundation, are taking action and finding ways to support working families in our community.

To date, more than 30 local businesses have joined the First Steps Business Alliance. More are always welcome. The Alliance is a strategic investment in our employees, families and our community's need to improve our children's school readiness.

Most families with young children have both parents in the work force. Many of these families struggle to balance work and family responsibilities. This struggle can reduce their productivity, focus and commitment on the job and feelings of effectiveness at home.

Employers who recognize this and provide workplace flexibility and work-life education programs realize benefits for both the employer and employee: more productive employees, reduced absences, higher employee retention, and an increase in employee's skills.

Employees appreciate the practical tips and suggestions that provide strategies for managing the tension between family and work responsibilities. Workers who have completed the trainings report increased confidence, less stress and increased skills they can apply both at work and at home. The return on investment that results from a family friendly work environment and workplace family life education has been documented and is sizeable.

For business leaders striving for success today and in the future, it is imperative to support working families today while preparing for the future. Our future work force depends on taking steps today to assure all children are successful at school. School readiness is everybody's business, and it begins with our own employees.

The community should be grateful for the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce and the area's businesses who are leading the way by taking the critical step to support work-life balance, business success and school readiness in our community.

Nancy Domaille is president of Domaille Engineering and David Oeth is managing director of RSM McGladrey. They are co-chairs of the First Steps Business Alliance, a coalition of Rochester businesses and the Chamber of Commerce dedicated to educating and preparing the local workforce for the future.